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EPISCOPAL DIVINITY SCHOOL

Thesis

THE BREAD OF LIFE:  
A THEO-ETHICAL ANALYSIS OF WORLD AGRICULTURE

BY

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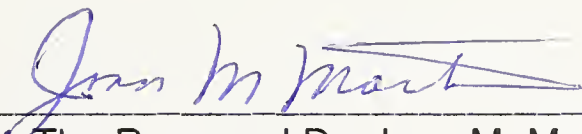
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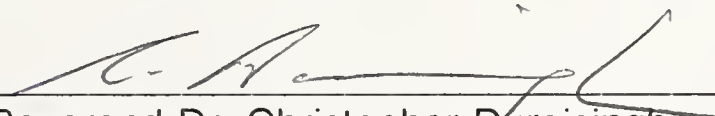
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## **Chapter 1**

### **An Overview of World Agriculture**

It was during a trip to Mexico with other students and faculty from my seminary that I became interested in world agriculture and its impact on the made-poor of the world. One day while visiting a mountain community called Tlamacazapa we met with an indigenous woman and her six- year-old daughter. We chatted and asked each other a few polite questions and it became apparent that this woman and her child were barely subsisting. They lived in a dirt and straw house and made a meagre living by selling a few handicrafts. Someone in our group asked this woman and her child, "What do you eat?"

"Tortillas", they told us.

"Just plain tortillas?" we asked.

"Yes, occasionally with beans. At festivals we sometimes eat tamales (another corn product)", the mother replied.

As we stood there stunned at this woman and her child's sparse diet, we were embarrassed to be asked by the child what we ate? I do not remember if any of us had the courage to answer. I know that I did not. Rather, I stood there feeling overwhelmed by the injustice of this woman and child's situation. By what twist of fate did the powers and principalities of the world conspire to package and ship an abundance of food products from the world over to my refrigerator and table in Western Canada, while this woman and her child, my sisters in Christ, suffered from poverty and malnutrition?

Upon returning from Mexico I began to research the structures that I was



complicit with that worked to deliver food to some of the world's citizens while denying it to so many of them. I was horrified by what I found.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Association (FAO) estimates that as the world approaches the end of the second millennium, 790 million of the world's 6 billion people, roughly one in seven, are hungry and do not have food security. It has also been estimated that, globally, someone dies from hunger every 3.6 seconds. Three-quarters of these deaths are of children under the age of five. While famine and wars cause an estimated 10% of hunger deaths, most are caused by chronic malnutrition and poverty. Chronic malnutrition and poverty also lead to such ailments as impaired vision, listlessness, stunted growth and increased susceptibility to disease. While there are less hungry people today than in 1970, this is mainly due to economic growth in Asia. There are actually more hungry people in Latin American and Africa today than in 1970.<sup>1</sup>

While the alarming rate of global hunger is not much discussed in mainstream media and parlance, when it is, it is my experience that the 'population problem' is assumed to be the root cause. It is assumed that 790 million people are hungry because there is not enough food and there are too many people. Efforts to address the situation therefore focus on increasing food production (usually through Green Revolution technologies and, more recently, biotechnology) and curbing world population growth (usually by coercing Third World women to have fewer children). This crude analysis and strategy is betrayed by the slogan of Monsanto, one of the most powerful companies on the world food scene, "Worrying about starving future generations won't feed

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<sup>1</sup> as cited by Ronald Sider, *Rich Christians in an Age of Hunger: Moving from Affluence to Generosity* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1997), p. 3.





them. Food biotechnology will.”<sup>2</sup>

Presently, the world produces enough food to provide every human being with 2,700 calories a day - well above the 2,350 calorie daily requirement.<sup>3</sup> Two other facts that should not be overlooked are that each day 1.2 billion people eat more than they need while an equal number of people go hungry,<sup>4</sup> and each day a huge proportion of the world's grain goes to feed not people, but the livestock that is mostly consumed by the First world. Clearly the problem is not over-population, lack of food, or inadequate means of production. Rather, the problem is *distribution*. The problem is that most of the world's food is put on the world market and is only accessible to those who have the capital to buy it. This means that despite the abundance of food, the made-poor, dispossessed, landless and under-and-unemployed of the world go hungry while the rich overeat. Not surprisingly, the hungry are usually Third World women and children.

The thesis of this paper is that the solution to the world hunger crisis is not, simply, to increase production, try and curb the world's population growth, and deal with the periodic food shortages and famines by giving food, technology and trade assistance. After having done extensive research, I have concluded that hunger in the world today is caused by the *means of production* and by the *unjust structures of distribution* in the modern, capitalist, agricultural

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<sup>2</sup> as cited by Andrew Kimbrell, “Why Biotechnology and High-Tech Agriculture Cannot Feed the World.” *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 293. Consult Monsanto's web page for their most recent Newspeak.

<sup>3</sup> as cited by David Beckmann and Arthur Simon, *Grace at the Table: Ending Hunger in God's World* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 66.

<sup>4</sup> John Vidal, “World obese catch up with the underfed” *Guardian Weekly*, March 9-15, 2000, p. 7.



system. It is my conviction that hunger is structured into the current means of food production and distribution and that hunger will only be alleviated when these structures are radically changed. If we simply, as we have been doing over the past decades, focus on increased production and leave distribution to the free market, without paying adequate attention to who in the world has control both over the means of production and distribution, the trend of the rich having access to more and more food while the made-poor become increasingly hungry, will continue.

In this first chapter I will give a preliminary sketch of world agriculture in order to illustrate the growing trend of the rich having more and more food while the made-poor become increasingly hungry. I will give a broad overview of the world agriculture system with special emphasis on the ways capitalism and colonialism, with the help of the modern economic and political systems, work to accumulate capital, land, resources and, ultimately, *food*, in the hands of the few leaving a great number of people without capital, land, resources and, *food*.

I am assuming that world agriculture is shaped by the inter-related food systems that exist globally. I find useful the description of 'food systems' that Susan George gives in her book, *Ill Fares the Land*. George describes a food system as "the totality of tangible and intangible means employed by a given human community for the production, conservation, distribution, and consumption of food."<sup>5</sup> She suggests that food systems are shaped by natural, cultural, political and economic factors. She emphasises that food systems are not closed, static entities. Rather, they are dynamic systems that, due to world

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<sup>5</sup> Susan George, *Ill Fares the Land: Essays on food, hunger, and power* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for Policy Studies, 1984), p. 19.





trade, are increasingly in contact and competition with each other.

Clearly it is my belief that food systems should be evaluated according to their ability to achieve 'food security.' While food security means different things to different communities, I have found the definition offered in the 1999 Zeist Declaration to be very useful. Although I will discuss the Zeist Declaration at greater length in the third chapter, for now I will simply cite their discussion of food security and the related topic of food sovereignty:

We recognise food security as the physical and economic access to safe and healthy food at all times in dignity. Key factors in realising food security are the issues of who produces food, where it is produced, what food is produced, how it is produced, as well as who controls trade and key productive resources, such as land, water, and biodiversity. Food Sovereignty to our countries and communities means having the democratic right and power to determine the production, distribution and consumption of food, according to our preferences and cultural traditions. Food security implies securing the livelihood of food producing communities.<sup>6</sup>

Because it is Third World women who experience the greatest food insecurity, my method for this paper will be to pay special attention to the ways in which food systems effect the lives of Third World women. I am focussing on Third World women because it has been my experience that listening to the voices of those who are oppressed and marginalised by a system is the most effective way to understand how a system operates. Listening to the voices of Third World women is also a helpful method because women produce at least half of the world's food. Nonetheless, it must be understood that the term 'Third World women,' is a construction of Western hegemonic discourse. As Chandra

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<sup>6</sup> The Zeist Declaration on Trade Liberalisation and the Right to Food. 1999  
[www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hunger992.htm](http://www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hunger992.htm)





Talpade Mohanty rightly points out, Western scholarship, including feminist scholarship, frequently constructs “‘third world women’ as a homogeneous ‘powerless’ group often located as implicit victims of particular socioeconomic systems.”<sup>7</sup> ‘Third World women’ is a ridiculously arbitrary term which is used to objectify women. It refers to billions of women, who speak thousands of different languages and come from hundreds of different countries. It refers to women who have varying educational backgrounds and varying amounts of political and economic power. Nevertheless, I would argue that as ridiculous as this term is, there is, unfortunately, something that binds many Third World women together. As Mohanty suggests, it is “*common context* of political struggle against class, race, gender and imperialist hierarchies that may constitute third world women as a strategic group at this historical juncture.”<sup>8</sup>

For the sake of this paper, I will employ this very problematic term to refer to those women whose lives are lived in active struggle against the imperialist system of world agriculture. Clearly not all women in the Third World suffer under the present system. Some, in fact, have been made wealthy from it. Moreover, every woman who does suffer under the current system has a different experience and has no doubt found different ways to respond. I do not mean to universalise the experience of all the women of the Third World. I use the term “Third World women’ as a lens by which I, a ‘First World woman,’ may begin to do a post-colonial analysis of the current system. Through this analysis

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<sup>7</sup> Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses.” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo and Lourdes Torres, eds. (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 57

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 58.



I can begin to see how this system that I am complicit with affects those whom it oppresses, marginalises, and disenfranchises. I do this in order that I may find ways to, from my own context, work against the injustices of this system and work towards a world in which all share in and are fed from the abundance of Creation.

In saying that I am doing a post-colonial analysis I am assuming that “post-colonialism deals with the effects of colonisation on cultures and societies.”<sup>9</sup> As such, it may be helpful to attempt to define colonialism. I utilise the definition given in The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought; “colonialism is the conquest and direct control of another people’s land, a phase in the history of imperialism, which in turn is the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production from the sixteenth century onwards.”<sup>10</sup> However, as helpful as the precision of this definition is, I also incorporate Steven Slemon’s statement that:

Colonialism, obviously is an enormously problematic category: it is by definition transhistorical and unspecific, and it is used in relation to very different kinds of historical oppression and economic control. [Nevertheless] like the term ‘patriarchy’, which shares similar problems in definition, the concept of colonialism. . . remains crucial to a critique of past and present power relations in world affairs.<sup>11</sup>

Slemon’s emphasis on the term ‘postcolonial’ being transhistorical and unspecific and referring to very different kinds of historical oppression and

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<sup>9</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen, Tiffin, eds. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*, (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 186.

<sup>10</sup> Stuart Sim, ed. *The Routledge Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ((New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 336.

<sup>11</sup> Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the empire: resistance theory for the Second World”, *World Literature Written in English* (30) 2: p. 31.





economic control is helpful in that an integral argument of this thesis is that the colonialism of past times, including biblical times, which centered on the accumulation of land, has much in common with the current colonialism of the deterritorialised accumulation of capital - both are concerned to accumulate resources. Therefore, while I will, at times, use the term neo-colonial to refer specifically to the new tactics of colonialism that have been employed since the decline of the European empires in the mid-twentieth century, I will use the broad term colonialism to refer to the tactics of the powers, both past and present, to control and accumulate the resources of other societies, populations, and countries.

I will also spend time exploring the relationships between colonialism and capitalism. For it is my conviction that capitalism is inextricable from colonialism and neo-colonialism. Political theorists, usually Marxist political theorists, point out that at a certain point in the development of capitalism it becomes necessary to export capital, expropriate resources and seek new markets outside the mother country.<sup>12</sup> My research of world agriculture has led me to conclude that this has indeed been the case. Historically, I would argue, we have never had capitalism without colonialism. Furthermore, I would argue that there never could be capitalism without colonialism. Clearly the economic exploitation of other peoples and lands that characterises colonialism is also the very backbone of capitalism. The one does not and could not exist without the other. Therefore, I will do a post-colonial analysis of the current system in the hopes of pointing towards a vision that truly is post-colonial.

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<sup>12</sup> see, for example, Vladimir Lenin, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*. Rev. trans. (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1948) and B. Warren, *Imperialism: Pioneer of Capitalism*. Ed. John Sender, 1980.





## **The effects of trade liberalisation on Third World women and food security**

The first thing that must be understood about world agriculture is that the political economies of colonialism, neo-colonialism and global capitalism strive to accumulate capital, land, resources and, ultimately, *food*, in the hands of the few leaving a great number of people, most of whom are women and children, without capital, land, resources and, *food*. World agriculture today assumes that land is to be owned by private owners and is to be used to maximise profit with the minimum of human labour. The product is then to be distributed in whatever manner brings the most profit to the owner. Equality of distribution is seldom or never part of the system. Efficiency of production, because it brings increased profit, is the driving force of modern agriculture. The problem is compounded by the fact that efficiency of production requires that larger and larger tracts of land be owned by fewer and fewer people. If the problem of distribution is addressed at all, government or aid agencies that are, in many ways, outside of the food system, are occasionally called upon to interfere in order to redistribute 'surplus' to those who are in need. All of this is a far cry from Third World women's traditional system of practising small-scale or subsistence farming on ancestral or communal lands to grow food for their families and communities.

World agriculture in global capitalism has dismissed the idea of local and small-scale farming and has instead gone the route of agribusiness and of open international trade in agricultural goods. This is the rationale behind most of the major trade agreements including the 1995 Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)



signed by all of the 135 member countries of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). This is also the rationale that is operative for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, open international trade in the agricultural sector is not without its problems. Open international trade presupposes the supremacy of the price system and of comparative advantage. This leads to a world system where economies and industrial sectors tend to be specialised instead of diversified. In turn, this increasingly specialised domestic production leads to a high level of dependence on international trade. Moreover, since, generally speaking, globally, capital is mobile while labour is not, prices are very much at the mercy of the world market. Producers have very little security and lose their market completely as soon as someone else comes along who can supply their product more cheaply. In short, under this system Third World farmers become suppliers of food products at prices they do not control and consumers of staple foods at prices they do not control either. In such a system Third World farmers have little or no food security and frequently suffer from poverty and hunger.

It is very dangerous for developing nations to be dependent on imports for their essential and staple food items. To be able to import cheap food products a country must have enough foreign exchange. Unfortunately developing countries are very often short of foreign exchange. As a result, changes in the world market, despite a global glut of goods, may lead developing countries to experience famines. This is especially the case for those countries labelled net-food importing developing countries (NFICCs). For this reason, some economists and analysts have concluded that it may be





wiser for developing countries to have as much domestic production of necessary food items as their land resources permit. These analysts argue that NFICCs should do this even if domestic production is more costly compared to imported food articles. However, despite the very sensible advice of these analysts, it must be understood that in the global economy today it is almost impossible for developing countries to adopt this strategy. Under the control of industrialised nations, international financial institutions and agreements are putting increasing pressure on developing nations to adopt open international trade in the agricultural sector. The latest round of trade negotiations in Seattle were proof of this phenomenon. It seems that only Cuba, a country that has been largely shut out of globalisation by the U.S. embargo, has been able to successfully implement this strategy of focussing on domestic production and consumption.

Furthermore, it should be understood that even if a country is successful in its export industries, this will not necessarily benefit the country as a whole. While growing crops for export can lead to increased employment and economic activity in a country, it can and often does lead to more and more land and resources being concentrated in the hands of a few and less and less land being owned or controlled by made-poor people and especially by women. As a result, a successful export industry will not necessarily lead to less people being poor and hungry. This phenomenon is well illustrated by contrasting the efforts of both Kenya and Costa Rica to increase their export of agricultural products. While both countries were successful in doing so, only Costa Rica reduced the number of hungry and made-poor people in the





country. Conversely, in Kenya, where the profits from the export agricultural industry were concentrated in the hands of a few plantation farmers and transnational corporations (TNCS), hunger and poverty were not alleviated and may in fact have increased as traditional farmers were displaced in favour of export agriculture.<sup>13</sup>

It should also be understood that most of the profits from export agriculture do not filter back to the farmers. For example, for every dollar U.S. consumers spend on cantaloupe, less than one penny of this goes back to the South American farmer. Traders, shippers and retailers receive eighty-eight cents.<sup>14</sup> Moreover, because 'vertical integration,' is one of the great tenets of globalisation, it is becoming less and less frequent that farmers in either the First or Third World have any control over what they grow or that they share in any of the wealth that is generated by their labours. Vertical integration is the effort of TNCs to control as many aspects of the system as possible. As Susan George explains, vertical integration in the agricultural realm "simply means that individual companies attempt to control as many segments of the line we have been describing as they possibly can [i.e. production, inputs, storage, processing, distribution, etc.] . . . in other words, this food is being grown either by hired labour or by farmers working under stringent corporate

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<sup>13</sup> for a further discussion of the situation in these two countries see Beckman and Simon, *Grace at the Table*., p. 120-121.

<sup>14</sup> Michael E. Conroy, Douglas L. Murray and Peter M. Rosset. *A Cautionary Tale: Failed U.S. Development Policy in Central America* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner/ Food First Development Studies, 1996), figure 4.4 as cited by Frances Moore Lappé, Joseph Collins, Peter Rosset, and Luis Espraza "Beyond Guilt and Fear" *The Paradox of Plenty: Hunger in a Bountiful World*, Douglas Boucher, ed. (Oakland California: Food First Books, 1999), p. 8.



specifications.”<sup>15</sup> In short, vertical integration makes farmers into the indentured servants of a feudal system. Instead of choosing what products to grow or raise and then selling these products on the market for what they believe is a fair price, farmers sign contracts with TNCs and grow or raise what the TNC requires (cash crops, genetically modified crops, chickens fed on unsafe feed, etc.) and sell these products back to the TNC at the price that the TNC dictates. Vertical integration seeks to integrate as many farmers as possible into the system of globalisation ensuring that more and more people, and more and more land, are under the control of TNCs.

Given these realities, one may well ask, therefore, in whose interest is it to have agriculture in the realm of open international trade? The answer, clearly, is the corporations of the industrialised nations. Indeed, it should not be forgotten that First World countries, especially the U.S., have an enormous interest in the world agricultural trade. For example, Cargill and ADM control 75-80% of world grain. Seventy percent of world cereals are controlled by four companies, Kellogg, Phillip Morris, General Mills and Quaker Oats.<sup>16</sup> Clearly, the corporations of industrialised nations, which have the capacity to export large quantities of agricultural products, want the agricultural sector to be brought into open international trade. They believe that this will open up markets for their products. As such, they put enormous pressure on their governments to make this happen. It should be understood that Robert Shapiro, chairman of Monsanto, one of the biggest companies in both

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<sup>15</sup> Susan George, *Feeding the Few: The Corporate Control of Food* (Washington: Institute for Policy Studies, 1979.), p. 38.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher D. Cook. “Consolidated cornucopia: how corporate food is ploughing small farmers into the ground.” *The Witness* Jan/Feb 1999, p. 10.





agribusiness and biotechnology, is also the chair of the President's Advisory Committee for Trade Policy and Negotiations. Moreover, Mickey Kantor, former U.S. trade representative to the 1993 Uruguay trade negotiations and the man who acted as trade counsel for the U.S. wheat industry at the WTO talks in Seattle in November 1999, is a board member of Monsanto. U.S. corporations have very successfully made their agenda of globalisation the agenda of the U.S. government. Similar tactics are being used, successfully, in other industrialised nations

The irony of this is that it is the industrialised nations in the world today who have the most protectionist policies in agriculture. The policy of industrialised nations seems to be free trade for everyone else and protectionism for us. This is certainly the message the developing world got at the recent WTO negotiations in Seattle. This hypocritical stance is also well illustrated by the fact that at the 1993 Uruguay trade negotiations those countries which had been using measures for import restraint were permitted to retain these measures at levels of 65-80% while countries that did not already have such restraints and subsidies were banned from implementing them. This is blatantly unfair as it perpetuates a system in which some countries, mainly industrialised nations, are allowed to protect and subsidise their own industries while other countries, mainly developing nations, are barred these same privileges and forced to compete in the international market on an unequal footing with the industrialised nations. One would think that if the industrialised nations are going to force the developing countries to compete on the 'open market' they would at least agree to open it up. This would be a great help to



developing countries. It has been estimated that reducing industrial-country barriers to developing country imports by half would be worth about as much as all the development assistance developing countries receive.<sup>17</sup>

The issue of subsidies and protectionism for agriculture versus open international trade becomes even clearer when it is looked at in historical perspective. When a historical analysis is done it becomes evident, for instance, that the prosperity that the U.S., Canada and the European Union (EU) members enjoy in world agriculture today is due, by and large, to the protectionist measures it has employed, especially in the post-Depression and post-war eras, and that it continues to employ today. For instance, the post-Depression and post-war era policies that protected and subsidised U.S. farmers meant that the rural U.S. soon became a vibrant domestic market for manufactured products from urban areas. As Peter Rosset explains, “this domestic demand fuelled economic growth in the urban areas, and the combination gave rise to broad-based growth.”<sup>18</sup> It was this broad based growth that enabled the U.S. to go on to develop a strong export economy.

Much of the reason that trade liberalisation leads to more people being poor and hungry is that open international trade is such that it leads to the decline of the small scale and subsistence farming. This is the means of survival for so many of the world’s people - and especially of the world’s women. The world over there are examples of how when import restraint and

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<sup>17</sup> U.N. Research Institute for Social Development, *Structural Adjustment, Global Integration and Social Democracy* (Geneva, 1998), p. 2 as cited by Beckmann and Simon, *Grace at the Table*; p. 122.

<sup>18</sup> Peter Rosset, “The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture” Policy Brief No. 4 Sept 1999 *Food First* [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org).





domestic subsidies disappear, so do small-scale and subsistence farmers. A 1995 report by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD) on the impact of liberalisation under Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) sums up the situation succinctly.

Farmers producing food for local markets have. . . been suddenly subjected to the cold wind of international competition - and many find it impossible to compete with technologically advanced farmers in Europe and North America who can sell cheaply in part because they have benefited from massive subsidies. Expanding international markets may have created vast opportunities for some wealthier farmers, but the impact on the livelihood of the rural poor in developing countries has been harsh.<sup>19</sup>

The truth of the above statement is testified to by the experience of countless farmers in the developing world. For example, while in the past the Philippines has used import restrictions to protect domestic food producers, bolster rural employment and promote national food self-sufficiency, over the past few years the Philippines has lowered import barriers to meet its WTO commitments. Indeed, in 1993 the government embarked on a new plan for agriculture called "Philippines 2000." Under its new plan, import restrictions on rice and other grains were lifted, and the monopoly of the government's National Food Authority to import and export rice was removed. High-value export crops such as flowers, asparagus, and other vegetables were encouraged. While this plan had the admirable goal of achieving industrial development and eradicating poverty by developing the export sector by the year 2000, as we sit at the beginning of the year 2000, it is clear that this plan has not achieved its goals

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<sup>19</sup> as cited by Martin Khor, "Macroeconomic policies that affect the South's agriculture." *Third World Network* [www.twinside.org.sg](http://www.twinside.org.sg)



and that, in fact, poverty and hunger have increased. Between 1993 and 1998 the area under food grains in the Philippines dropped by more than half. Food security has declined dramatically.

While all agricultural sectors in the Philippines have suffered, maize (corn) is a good example of just how trade liberalisation has hurt Filipino farmers. In the absence of trade restrictions, U.S. maize can be sold at half the price of maize grown on the Philippine island of Mindanao. As a result, the livelihood of about a half a million Filipino maize farmers (out of a total 1.2 million) are threatened. Filipino maize farmers simply cannot compete with cheap U.S. imports. This is hardly surprising considering that there is a surplus of maize in the U.S. and, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), each U.S. farmer receives a subsidy of about \$29,000 annually. That is about 120 times the average income of maize farmers in the Philippines.

Unfortunately, the Philippines is just one example of how flooding Third World economies with cheap food imports has had devastating effects on the made-poor and especially on made-poor women. In the short term, an influx of cheap imports drives down farm prices and drives farmers off the land. Over the medium term, as crop prices stay low, so do the profits per unit area and, as such, the minimum area of land needed to support a family is raised. As a result, more and more land is abandoned by smaller farmers and more and more land ends up in the hands of larger, wealthier farmers. Rural communities die out as farm workers migrate to the cities. More and more people depend on money - not land - to feed themselves and their families. Fluctuations in





employment, wages and world food prices, now drive millions into poverty and hunger. As Third World women often have enormous difficulty gaining access to capital, they and their children are usually the first to go hungry. The Asian financial crisis was and is an all too real example of this phenomenon.

However, it is not only in the developing world that farmers suffer the effects of trade liberalisation. In the U.S., the export boom contributed to a 25% increase in average farm size and the loss of one third of all American farmers between 1979 and 1992 (U.S. Census of Agriculture 1992). The truth is that the export boom in American agricultural has not benefited the farmers. Profits are also lost by the fact that farmers are becoming increasingly dependent on expensive inputs such as energy, pesticides and fertilisers, seeds, technology and machinery. All of this, coupled with the fact that storage, processing and distribution of food are, in the world today, immensely complex operations that cost two-thirds of every dollar spent on food,<sup>20</sup> means less and less profit for the farmer. In addition, all of these inputs and distribution costs also mean that modern agriculture is very much a non-sustainable and, ironically, inefficient, enterprise. The truth is that modern agriculture absorbs more energy in the form of fuel and inputs than it gives back in calories.

### **Neo-colonialism's effects on the food security of Third World women**

As mentioned above, the food systems of the world today are such that one seventh of the world's 6 billion citizens do not enjoy food security. A large part of the reason for this is that the colonial and neo-colonial structures of the world deny food sovereignty to most of the world's countries. While throughout

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<sup>20</sup> Susan George, *Feeding the Few*, p. 22.





history empires have consistently commandeered the food sources of other nations, this was brought to a whole new level with European colonialism's and then neo-colonialism's invention of the cash crop. Indeed, our neo-colonial era is such that the economies of many so-called developing nations are entirely constructed towards the production of primary products for export to the First World. This leaves the physical needs of their own citizens to the mercy of their ability to import goods from the First World. Neo-colonialism is continuing colonialism's tradition of creating and maintaining colonies and using them as a means by which those with excess capital can appropriate the resources of the Third World to turn a profit.

The link between colonialism and agriculture is not new. In the nineteenth century, British economist John Stuart Mill reasoned that colonies should not be thought of as countries in their own right but rather as 'agricultural establishments' whose sole purpose was to supply the 'larger community to which they belong.'"<sup>21</sup> Unfortunately, Mill's vision has, in many ways, been realised. Since colonialism began the colonies provided land for plantations with cheap labour, if not slaves, cheap raw materials, and markets for industrial products. All of this had a devastating effect on food security. It must be understood that the societies that now face endemic food shortage and are net food importing countries were food abundant societies in pre-colonial times.

Europe, beginning with Columbus, did not go out and find 'underdeveloped' countries; she created them. For example, the system of 'mono-cultural production,' described by certain experts as the source of backwardness in the Third World, is not a system that dropped from heaven. It was brought and imposed by the Europeans on all their colonies in Asia, Africa, and Latin

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<sup>21</sup> as cited by Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 168.



The effect of colonialism on food security in Kenya is a good case in point.<sup>23</sup>

Before the colonial era, Kenya enjoyed fairly good food-security and had a system/tradition of storing food against times of poor crops and drought. During the colonial era, exotic crops were introduced and government policy favoured export over production for local consumption. In the neo-colonial era, land tenure systems were used to encourage people to help produce export crops such as coffee, sugar and tea. Monocropping for export became the order of the day. Food storage became a distant memory and food insecurity rose. While the government did make efforts to help farmers meet local food demands *and* produce food for export, by and large these efforts failed. The food and economic crises of the 1970s led to the IMF and World Bank imposing a Structural Adjustment Program (SAP) in 1981. Among other things, the SAP recommended that the government reduce import taxes and liberalise agricultural trade. While the aim of the SAP was to rebuild the economy and increase agricultural productivity and trade, what the SAP really resulted in was increased poverty in rural areas. Hellen Jepkerich Too-Yego of the Christian Community Services of Anglican Church of Kenya sums up the effects of the SAP in Kenya.

This is characterised by persistent food deficits, poor infrastructure, poor medical services, decreased incomes, increased alcoholism, hooliganism and loss of any

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<sup>22</sup> Eugene Toland, Thomas Fenton, and Lawrence McCulloch, "World Justice and Peace: A Radical Analysis for American Christians" in Thomas P. Fenton, ed. *Education for Justice: A Resource Manual* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1975), p. 102 as cited by Tissa Balysuriya, *Planetary Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984), p. 22.

<sup>23</sup> for a more complete discussion see Hellen Jepkerich Too-Yego, "Experiences of women, food security and structural adjustment programmes in rural Kenya." [www.oneworld.org/aprodev.hungry992.htm](http://www.oneworld.org/aprodev.hungry992.htm)





reasonable protection for farmers. A recent report on development and poverty revealed that 47 percent of Kenyans are absolutely poor in rural areas. . . Furthermore, 34 percent of Kenyan children under 5 now suffer from stunted growth due to malnutrition. This is an increase from 28 percent in 1981, when the SAP started.<sup>24</sup>

SAPs have had similarly devastating effects on the food security of other countries. For example, SAPs in Bénin resulted in average spending on food increasing to an astounding 60 percent of household income. Over 40 percent of the population is reported to have reduced the number of meals eaten per day following the implementation of SAPs.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, a conservative assessment of the impact of the liberalisation of agriculture in India suggests that in the year 2000 there will be 5.6% more hungry people in India than there would have been had trade liberalisation not occurred. It is also estimated that free trade will lead to a 26.2% reduction in human consumption of agricultural produce.<sup>26</sup>

In short, what SAPs, like all other forms of trade liberalisation, have done to the Third World is to render these countries suppliers of food products at prices they do not control and consumers of staple foods at prices they do not control. John Stuart Mill would be proud.

### **Agribusiness' latest weapon - biotechnology**

Having given this brief post-colonial analysis of world agriculture, I would like to go on, in the next section, to examine in more detail the current rise of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> see Roch L. Monbo, "Trade, structural adjustment and food security: the case of urban households in Benin" [www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hungry992.htm](http://www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hungry992.htm)

<sup>26</sup> K. Fronberg, G. Fisher and K. Parika, "Would Developing Countries Benefit from Agricultural Trade Liberalisation in OECD Countries?" in I. Goldin and O. Knudsen, eds. *Agricultural Trade Liberalisation - Implications for Developing Countries*, OECD, Paris, 1990.





biotechnology, its influence on world agriculture, and its impact on hunger and poverty. I will use biotechnology as a case in point of how modern agricultural practices have increased production while at the same time the system has evolved in such a way that less people proportionally have the means of producing food for themselves, their families and their communities.

Like it or not, the biotechnology industry is one of the main forces in the world today controlling who does and does not eat. In Spring 1999, Robert Shapiro, CEO of Monsanto, bragged to his shareholders that the launch of genetically modified (GM) crops had been the most "successful launch of any technology ever, including the plough."<sup>27</sup> While this may or may not be the case, it is true that as the twenty-first century begins, the biotechnology industry is rapidly appearing as a new and more severe colonial power which denies the bread of life to much of the world's population. Having already appropriated the land and labour of the Third World, colonialism is now appropriating the natural and genetic resources of the Third-World in order to feed its insatiable appetite for profit. As Vandana Shiva suggests,

The land, the forests, the rivers, the oceans, the atmosphere, have all been colonised, eroded, and polluted. Capital now has to look for new colonies to invade and exploit for its further accumulation. These new colonies are, in my view, the interior spaces of the bodies of women, plants and animals.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> as cited in John Vidal, "How Monsanto's mind has changed." *The Guardian Weekly* Oct. 14-20, 1999, p. 12.

<sup>28</sup> Vandana Shiva, "The Seed and the Earth: Biotechnology and the Colonisation of Regeneration" *Close to Home: Women Reconnect Ecology, Health and Development Worldwide* Vandana Shiva. ed. (Philadelphia and Gabriola Island: New Society Publishers, 1994), p. 129.



## The Biotechnology Industry- a brief overview

For thousands of years, farmers around the world have practised sustainable agriculture by saving the seeds from one year's crops and replanting those that came from the more successful plants the next year. Indian farmers, when planting a seed, sometimes say the following simple prayer, "Let the seed be exhaustless; let it never get exhausted, let it bring forth seed next year."<sup>29</sup> For most of agricultural history throughout the world, farmers have saved seed, reused seed, and exchanged and shared seed with one another. Seed, as the first link in the food system, is the basis of life and something that should be available to all. For most of history, it has been.

However, in the last decades of the twentieth century, innovations in genetic engineering (GE), coupled with world trade practices, have meant that instead of being free resources available to all, seeds have become commodities that are regulated by world trade, subject to intellectual property rights (IPRs), and produced and sold by TNCs. Our economic system is such that farmers collecting and replanting their own seeds and *growing* crops does not register as *growth*. The economic system defines growth, not as our ability to *grow* food, but to *grow* profits for TNCs. Seeds, therefore, have become commodities. As a result, farmers are increasingly either being encouraged to or having to buy seeds from TNCs instead of having free access to seeds.

The commodification of seeds by TNCs has not only been a battle against local communities and local agricultural practices, but it has also been a battle against Creation . Seed is a problematic product for TNCs because it

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<sup>29</sup> as cited by Vandana Shiva on July 18, 1998 an interview with *In Motion Magazine* on [www.inmotion.org](http://www.inmotion.org)





has the pesky habit of replicating itself and hence being able to be used and reused. It is difficult to control the supply of seed since, unlike products that are commercially produced, seed reproduces itself. Seed is one of those aspects of Creation that lends itself very easily to shared abundance. However, as increased profit, not shared abundance, is the ethos of biotechnology companies, Monsanto has solved this problem in two ways.

First of all, not only has Monsanto patented its seeds, but it has also required that those planting Monsanto seeds pay a “technology fee” and sign a contract requiring that they will not use any of the seeds from the harvested crop the next year. The second solution that Monsanto has hatched to deal with the ‘problem’ of seeds reproducing themselves is to genetically engineer plants that produce sterile seeds. These seeds have been termed ‘Terminator Technology’ and are a crystal clear example of humanity genetically and artificially altering Creation for the sake of profits. However, it is interesting to note that this ‘terminator technology’ produced such a moral outcry that Monsanto has agreed, at least for now, not pursue further research into this technology. Monsanto was surprised by the opposition to this technology not only by all of the world’s big agricultural research organisations, but also by citizens, especially in Europe and the developing world. They were increasingly sensitive to such consumer concerns after the technology was banned in India and Zimbabwe. The final straw came when U.S. corn (almost all U.S. corn is genetically modified) exports to Europe fell 96% between the summer of 1998 and 1999; Monsanto was open to persuasion. Gordon Conway of the Rockefeller Foundation was able to convince Monsanto to halt





research and development of this technology and to participate in wide consultation on the issue.<sup>30</sup>

The irony of GE is that , in many cases, the seeds that TNCs such as Monsanto are producing and selling are inferior to the indigenous varieties that farmers, especially women farmers, have been planting for centuries. For example, trials of GE cotton in India resulted in yields which were 50% to 75% lower than the indigenous cotton varieties of local farmers.<sup>31</sup> The development of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) did not, after all, come about because native crop varieties were inherently deficient. Rather, the problem with indigenous seeds is that they cannot withstand high doses of chemicals. Therefore, companies like Monsanto (whose biggest-selling product is the herbicide Round-Up and who is concerned to increase sales of Roundup due to the fact that this product's patent runs out in 2000) have invested millions of dollars in developing and marketing GMOs which are resistant to Roundup and to other chemicals.

This problem of the inferiority of genetically modified seeds has been explicitly acknowledged. In 1988 the World Bank (WB) lent India \$150 million in order to create better markets for seeds. The rationale for the loan was stated in one of the WB documents as such: "In the self-pollinated crops, especially wheat and rice, farmer retention and farmer transfer accounted for much of the seed used, while some of the [new varieties] were inferior in grain quality to traditional types and thus lost favour among the farmers."<sup>32</sup> Because there is

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<sup>30</sup> John Videl, "How Monsanto's Mind Has Changed," p. 12.

<sup>31</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Uprooting the seeds of hope," *Guardian Weekly* 20: April 4, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Uprooting the seeds of hope," p. 20.



very little evidence that GE crops are in any way superior to indigenous ones, elaborate and expensive advertising campaigns are necessary in order to introduce them. Because indigenous seeds are, at least for now, in plentiful supply, corporations must create a demand for their GE products.

What these expensive publicity campaigns do not mention is that there is a tremendous knowledge gap regarding the short-term and the long-term effects of these crops both to human and animal health, as well as to the environment as a whole. For example, the result of “Roundup Resistant” crops created by Monsanto interbreeding with wild grasses and plants may well be the creation of a whole range of pesticide resistant ‘Superweeds.’ Moreover, there is also evidence that the GM crop plants that have been developed to produce their own pesticide are causing the rapid appearance of pesticide resistant insects.<sup>33</sup> Both of these phenomena will necessitate the use of ever more potent and dangerous pesticides. Finally, I do not even want to contemplate what would happen if the technology protecting system (TPS) that companies are using in their terminator technology for producing sterile seeds, was to interbreed with other plants. Could we have an entire planet of plants that produce sterile seeds? If this were to happen it would be genocide to all life on earth!!! It would seem that Mae-Wan Ho may be correct in saying that gene manipulation is much worse than nuclear weapons as a means of mass destruction.<sup>34</sup> Horizontal gene transfer is but one of the many frightening and unpredictable effects of introducing GE crops.

However, while there is quite a bit of uncertainty as to the exact biological

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<sup>33</sup>HRH the Prince of Wales, “Seeds of Disaster” *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 252.

<sup>34</sup> Dr. Mae-Wan Ho as cited by Bill Christenson, “Family Farmers Warn of Dangers of Genetically Engineered Crops.” *In Motion Magazine* [www.inmotion.org](http://www.inmotion.org)





effects of these crops, we are beginning to see quite clearly their social and economic repercussions and especially the repercussions for Third World women. Many farmers, lured by high-profile advertising, have been persuaded to buy costly GE seeds. Predictably, these seeds have not performed as promised leaving the farmers hungry and in debt. Thousands of farmers in India have committed suicide due to indebtedness linked to poorly performing hybrid and GE seeds.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, the loss of biodiversity that this new type of agriculture has caused has also had tragic effects on farmers' well-being. The further shift to monocropping has led to the deterioration of people's diets in much of the Third World. As Vandana Shiva points out, "what are weeds for Monsanto are food, fodder and medicine for Third World women."<sup>36</sup> For instance, in West Bengal, 124 "weed" species collected from the rice fields are used by farmers. Not only will the use of Roundup-Ready crops destroy these important resources, but it will also undermine the role cover crops and mixed crops have on soil erosion.<sup>37</sup> I think that this problem of loss of diversity is well summarised by Marty Strange.

In agricultural economics, a bias against diversification persists, reflecting the conviction that doing one thing well on a large scale is more important than doing many things well on a small scale. It is a function of our fixation with maximums, and our indifference to optimums.<sup>38</sup>

Strange does a good job of illustrating that what might make good sense to

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<sup>35</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Uprooting the seeds of hope," p. 20.

<sup>36</sup> Vandana Shiva, "Monsanto' Roundup: a recipe for soil erosion and an end to diversity." *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 272.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Marty Strange, as cited by Andrew Kimbrell, "Why Biotechnology and High-Tech Agriculture Cannot Feed the World." *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 296.



market analysts sitting in corporate headquarters in the First World, does not make any sense to Third World women trying to practice subsistence farming.

While in theory it is possible that GE plants could be more nutritious, travel better, and produce better yields in harsh climates, there ample evidence to suggest that this is, in fact, not the case. However, my main concern is that the increasing commodification and globalisation of agriculture that will accompany GE will inevitably lead to less and less people having control over land and seed and more people, especially Third World women and children, becoming poor and hungry. The fact is that 1.4 billion people are currently being fed by food that is grown by poor farmers who save their own seed.<sup>39</sup> TNCs are trying to make this practice illegal. If they succeed, I see no guarantee that these 1.4 billion people will be fed. Indeed, given that it is estimated that the elimination of home-grown seed would cost farmers \$6 billion to biotech companies annually,<sup>40</sup> it is clear that, instead of being fed, these people will be even more hungry. While globalisation is the best policy if profit is the ultimate goal, experience shows that subsidiarity is the best economic and agricultural policy if the goal is to feed more people. World hunger is not a result of a shortage of food, but rather a result of unjust distribution.

Nevertheless, the biotechnology industry, with the help of the U.S. government, is making it very difficult for the Third World to resist its spread. While consumer driven resistance in the First and the Third World has led some governments to consider banning GE imports, the U.S. has sided with the TNCs and threatened to restrict the exports of these countries should they introduce

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<sup>39</sup> Richard a. Steinbrecher and Pat Roy Mooney, "Terminator Technology: The Threat to World Food Security, *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 279.

<sup>40</sup> Vandana Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, (London: Zed Books, 1991), p. 245.





such measures. The U.S. is, after all, the world's largest producer of GM food. Vice President Gore and USDA officials have warned that \$250 million in exports could be imperilled if GE maize is not approved by the EU.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Cabinet documents from New Zealand show that the U.S. government threatened to pull out of a free trade deal if New Zealand went through with its plan to label and test GM food.<sup>42</sup>

## **Genetic Engineering and Colonialism**

One does not have to spend much time researching GE before it becomes apparent that the GE revolution in agriculture is without a doubt a new and oppressive form of colonialism. It is yet one more way to increase the drain of resources from South to North and to increase the control the North has over the South. Similar to colonisers of past ages who, instead of admitting that they were greedily going abroad to rape and plunder the resources of the Other, suggested that what they were actually doing was bearing the 'white man's burden' of civilising the world, Monsanto, as we saw above, has suggested that, far from being a means to corporate profit, their technologies are actually a philanthropic solution to world hunger. Nevertheless, I remain unconvinced. I wonder if we should put the control of the world's food production into the hands of a TNC whose primary concern is profit? Monsanto is, after all, the same company that has brought us PCBs, Agent Orange, and Roundup, the world's most popular herbicide? It is also doubtful that world hunger is going to be solved by TNCs who assume that Creation is a commodity that is subject to intellectual property rights and that should be bought and sold on the world

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<sup>41</sup> Kevin O'Sullivan. "Battle-lines Are Drawn Over GM Foods," *Irish Times* May 19, 1998, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> "Government For, By and Of Monsanto." *The Ecologist*, vol 29. no. 1, Jan/Feb 1999, p. 5.





market.

It is worth noting that, with the exception of South Africa, all of the African delegates to the International Undertaking for Plant Genetic Resources (June 1998) put out a statement saying that they “strongly object that the image of the poor and hungry from our countries is being used by giant multinational corporations to push technology that is neither safe, environmentally friendly, nor economically beneficial to us.”<sup>43</sup> While these African leaders have a clear understanding of the problems of hunger in their own nations, they also have a structural analysis of the situation and are not persuaded that biotechnology is the answer to their problems.

We do not believe that such companies or gene technologies will help our farmers produce the food that is needed in the twenty-first century. On the contrary, we think it will destroy the diversity, the local knowledge and the sustainable agricultural systems that our farmers have developed for millennia and that it will thus undermine our capacity to feed ourselves.<sup>44</sup>

While these leaders are clear that changes in agricultural practices are needed in their countries, they are firm that it should build upon, not replace, local knowledge and that it should address the real needs of their people, not the profit motives of TNCs.<sup>45</sup>

This statement from African leaders is insightful and helpful for many reasons, not the least of which is that it resists the efforts of TNCs to globalise agriculture and food production and argues for some form of subsidiarity in food production. It argues that the means of production and the knowledge of

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<sup>43</sup> as cited “No- Let Creation’ Harvest Continue!” *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 291.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.



production should be in the hands of the people, and that they should have control over their own livelihoods and well-being. The statement also comes to the defence of local knowledge. Indeed, the commodification of both life and knowledge is a huge underlying issue in all discussions pertaining to GE.

GE is protected by the World Trade Organization's Trade-Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). It is because of TRIPS that companies that, in the lab, make slight genetic modifications to crops, are able to patent their products. However, what must not be overlooked is that TRIPS take for granted the racist and patriarchal framework of Western science. They exclude all knowledge and innovations that take place in local communities. For example, Third World farmers who hybridise seed on their own farms and in their own communities are not protected, while scientists who take samples from these same farmers and make minor genetic modifications in the lab are highly rewarded. In short, TRIPS have everything to do with corporate science and nothing to do with sustainable and subsistence agricultural practices. As Ho points out, "under this unfair convention, Northern countries are allowed to take freely from the South, as 'common' heritage' genetic resources which are then returned to them as priced commodities."<sup>46</sup> It is not difficult to see that this is a colonial framework. Not only is it a new and more insidious means to appropriate the resources of the South to satisfy the greed of the North, but, as Pat Mooney states, "the argument that intellectual property is only recognisable when performed in laboratories with white lab coats is fundamentally a racist

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<sup>46</sup> Mae-Wan Ho, *Genetic Engineering Dream or Nightmare ? The Brave New World of Bad Science and Big Business* (Bath: Gateway Books, 1998), p. 23.





view of scientific development.”<sup>47</sup> It fails either to recognise or to value the scientific and sustainable agricultural innovations made by the peoples, and especially the women, of the Third World.

## **Conclusions**

Having researched both the agribusiness industry generally, and, more specifically, the biotechnology industry, it occurs to me that the assumption that individuals have the right to private property, to capital and the right, if not the responsibility, to use these rights to compete in the world market and contribute to economic growth is the backbone of both of these industries. Simply put, I would argue that it is the capitalist system, with its assumptions of: 1) stark individualism 2) competition 3) protection of the right of the few to possess property 4) a vision of unlimited progress and growth and so-called efficiency, that is driving modern agribusiness and biotechnology and perpetuating a world in which, despite a surplus in food production, distribution is such that 790 million people are hungry and do not have food security. As such, it is all four of these assumptions of the capitalist system that must be challenged if we are going to move toward a world in which all are fed and no one is left starving.

Throughout this chapter there have been numerous illustrations of how dependent agribusiness and the biotechnology industry are on the above four assumptions. For example, we have seen how both of these industries exist within a framework that assumes that land, seeds, genetic information, and, of course, food, are commodities to be owned, bought and sold by individuals (1). It is assumed that those with capital have the right to unrestrained ownership of

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<sup>47</sup> Pat Mooney, “From Cabbages to Kings,” *Intellectual Property vs Intellectual Integrity*, ICDA report as cited by Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, p. 259.



these things (3) and have the right to control how, when, at what price and to who they are distributed (2). Moreover, the TRIPS that are the foundation of this industry grant patents to *individual* (1) scientists who make discoveries in industry-funded labs but exclude all knowledge and innovations that take place in local *communities*. These incontestable property rights (3) then work to ensure the riches of those who are already wealthy and powerful, while further impoverishing those who are already poor and marginalised. The patenting of genes and the commodifying of knowledge and seeds assumes that competition, rather than cooperation and sharing (2), are to govern world agriculture and that the goal is to be the accumulation of profit rather than the sharing of resources and the creation of a sustainable system (4).

It is for this reason that I am going to turn, in the second chapter of this paper, to the Bible as a tool for critiquing the current world agriculture system. I have found the modern capitalist economy to be an economy that not only excludes all those who do not have capital, but that concurrently works to accumulate capital and resources in the hands of the few and out of the hands of the majority. On the other hand, within the biblical texts I have found is a vision of an economy, of an *oikoumene*, in which all are included, all are invited into the household and all are fed. It is this vision that I will seek out in the next chapter so that, in the third and final chapter, I may offer up this economy as an alternative to the one we currently have.





## Chapter 2

### The Biblical Vision of Shared Abundance

While it may not seem to be the most obvious choice to turn to the Bible as a tool to critique the food systems of the world today, it is because I am convinced that the problem of world hunger is caused by the unjust systems of ownership and distribution that the modern capitalist economic structures perpetuate, that I have chosen to employ a biblical hermeneutic and a theological method to address world hunger. I believe that it is a useful way by which assumptions that are the basis of the present system can be unmasked, addressed, and critiqued.

First of all, the sad reality is that unjust food systems that deny food to the many while hoarding it for the sake of the few are not solely a twenty-first century reality. Even though the food systems of biblical times were radically different than they are today, the structures, then, as now, denied food and access to Creation to much of the population. I cite the following passage as a poignant example of just how little things have changed from Job's context of the tributary imperial system of Hellenism to our present system of globalisation.

Why are the times not kept by the Almighty, and why do those who know him never see his days? The wicked remove landmarks; they seize flocks and pasture them. They drive away the donkey of the orphan; they take the widow's ox for a pledge. They thrust the needy off the road; the poor of the earth all hide themselves. Like wild asses in the desert they go out to their toil, scavenging in the wasteland food for their young. They reap in a field not their own and they glean in the vineyard of the wicked. They live all night naked, without clothing, and have no covering in the cold. They are wet with the rain of the mountains, and cling to the rock for want of shelter. "There are those who snatch the orphan child from the breast, and take as a pledge the infant





of the poor. They go about naked, without clothing; though hungry, they carry the sheaves; between their terraces they press out oil; they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst. From the city the dying groan, and the throat of the wounded cries for help; yet God pays no attention to their prayer."

Job. 24:1-12

Clearly there are frightening parallels between the poor and landless of Job's time and the poor and landless of today. Given this reality, I believe that it would be a helpful exercise to exegete some of the biblical passages regarding land and food and use them as liberative texts to decry the ways the modern food systems exploit so much of the world's population. Throughout the biblical texts there are examples of how the communities represented therein responded to the injustices of the means of production and distribution of their day and offered a vision of a world in which all share in and all are fed from the abundance of God's Creation is offered.

As mentioned in the first chapter, the assumptions of modern day agriculture are that land can and should be privately owned and that what is produced from the land should be distributed according to market forces for the sake of the profit of the owner. A biblical hermeneutic and a theological analysis can be used to critique both of these assumptions. Pervading both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament is the affirmation that the earth - the land - ultimately belongs to God. The land is seen as God's creation and possession. Humans are entrusted with the use of the gifts of the land so that they may enjoy the abundant life that God intends for all of Creation. However, humans are always called to remember and to be accountable to the fact that the land is God's and they are but guests. As such, they must share the gifts of Creation



with all. Throughout this chapter, therefore, I will use the biblical ideas that God is both owner of the earth and host of all of Creation - the host that wishes all the guests to enjoy abundant life - to critique present day world agriculture and to point towards a new paradigm. I will assume that as guests in a land where God is both owner and host, we as humans are called to be faithful to our God and Creator by living into God's vision of shared abundance. Rather than participating in the sinful structures of the world that seek to deny sustenance to the many and concentrate wealth in the hands of the few, we are called to be faithful witnesses to God's alternative vision by working to create structures that share the earth's abundance amongst all God's people. We are called to live into God's vision of a time when:

They shall all sit under their own vines and under their own  
fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid; for the mouth  
of the Lord of hosts has spoken. Mic.  
4:4

The concept of God as the owner and host who has a vision of shared abundance for all, was well summed up by the then Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple.

The fundamental biblical principle is that the earth - land - belongs to God; men [sic] enjoy the use of it, and this use may be so regulated as to ensure to particular families both security in that enjoyment and exclusive right to it. But this was to be so done as to ensure also that members of the community shared in the enjoyment of some portion. There was to be no proletariat. There were thus to be rights of property, but they were rights shared by all, and were subject to the overruling consideration that God alone had ultimate ownership of the land, and families to whom it was allotted being his stewards.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order* (London: Shephard-Walymyn, 1976 [originally published by Penguin in 1942]), p. 48.





I would argue that Temple is right that the idea that the land belongs to God and that all are to enjoy some portion of it is indeed a fundamental biblical principle. In this section I will draw on specific biblical texts, first in the Hebrew Scriptures and then in the New Testament, to explore the picture that emerges therein of God as the owner and host of the earth who calls the people to God's vision of shared abundance for all .

## **Hebrew Scriptures**

It was in the Promised Land that the Israelites came to the full realisation that God is owner and host and that they are to behave accordingly. However, I wish to start this study not in the Promised Land but in Egypt, where, in many ways, the Israelites started. Indeed, I wish to start this study with an examination of part of the story of Joseph in the book of Genesis. I will focus on the part of the story when Joseph becomes Pharaoh's 'right hand man' and is given enormous power in Egypt - especially over the agricultural lands of Egypt and the people who depend upon them. I examine this story because of the many ways the agricultural/political system that Joseph comes to represent is the type of system from which God repeatedly delivers the people. I find it fascinating that the vision of the land and the people's relationship with it that emerges in the Promised Land is in multiple ways the antithesis of the system that Joseph has power over in Egypt. The story of Joseph demonstrates the dangers of a society in which any one person or system has control over the distribution of food. While Joseph's intentions may well have been good, I would argue that the inordinate power that he is given by Pharaoh is intrinsically dangerous and that it is therefore not surprising that he ends up helping to deliver his own people



into slavery. As I recently saw written on someone's t-shirt, 'Abuse of power comes as no surprise.'

The part of the story of Joseph that interests me begins when Joseph interprets Pharaoh's dream as a sign that there will be seven years of plenty followed by seven years of famine. As such, Joseph advises the Pharaoh to take one-fifth of the food from the years of plenty and save it for the years of famine (Gen. 41:25-36). Pharaoh is so pleased by this plan that he rewards Joseph by giving him enormous political power. "You shall be over my house, and all my people shall order themselves as you command; only with regard to the throne will I be greater than you." (Gen. 41:40). It is therefore Joseph who is entrusted with executing this food saving plan. And Joseph does indeed gather up the grain that comes during the years of plenty. "So Joseph stored up grain in such abundance - like the sand of the sea - that he stopped measuring it; it was beyond measure." (Gen. 41:49). And during the years of famine not only did the people of Egypt come and buy grain from him, but the people of Canaan did so as well. And soon the people ran out of money and came pleading to Joseph. And Joseph took in exchange for food, first their livestock, and then their land.

So Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh. All the Egyptians sold their fields, because the famine was severe upon them; and the land became Pharaoh's. As for the people, he made slaves of them; from one end of Egypt to the other. Only the land of the priests he did not buy; for the priests had a fixed allowance that Pharaoh gave them; therefore they did not sell their land. Then Joseph said to the people, 'Now that I have this day both you and your land for Pharaoh, and four-fifths shall be your own, as seed for the field and as food for yourselves and your households, and as food for your little ones.' They said, "You have saved





our lives; may it please my lord, we will be slaves to Pharaoh.” So Joseph made it a statute concerning the land of Egypt, and it stands to this day, that Pharaoh should have the fifth.

Gen. 47:20-26

This is a common story. It is the story of how the system works to appropriate the abundance of the people, namely, by taking tribute. Reading this story one could ask, why could the people not store in their own warehouses the surplus from the seven years of abundance? What gave Joseph the right to take it from them, store it in Pharaoh’s storehouses, and then sell it back to the people at such a cost that they are eventually forced to give over their livestock, their land, and their very selves? Why does Joseph use this exploitative situation as an opportunity to set up a system whereby Pharaoh gets one-fifth of the crop in perpetuity?

The reason that I find this story so fascinating is because it is a story that continues to repeat itself. How many farmers during the Dust Bowl years in the U.S. and Canada had their farms bought by rich people from the city but were allowed to stay on the land farming it, so long as they sent a part of the profit into the city? How many farmers today, in both the First and the Third World, raise livestock or grow crops for TNCs and have no control either over what they grow or what they will be paid? Reading and reflecting on the story in Genesis I am left asking why the world continues to be plagued with Josephs, indeed with TNCs that are much worse than Joseph, who, instead of allowing the people simply to farm the land and enjoy part of the abundance that comes from their labour, enslave the people and expropriate both their land and their labour?

The other reason that I am fascinated by the Joseph story is because





throughout the biblical texts God repeatedly promises to deliver the people from the type of slavery that Joseph comes to represent. While there is no explicit criticism of Joseph in the Genesis narrative, it cannot be overlooked that the foundational event for the Israelite people is their delivery from slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Over and over again the biblical texts God calls his people away from the slavery that they knew in Egypt and towards the shared abundance that the Promised Land represents. While land and resources were hoarded and the people made slaves in Egypt, in the Promised Land all are to share in the abundance that God has provided. In the Promised Land there is to be no Pharaoh and there are to be no Josephs. Rather, there is a covenant between the people and God and all are to share in the abundance.

In the remainder of the section I will examine some of the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures that emerge after the people are delivered from slavery in Egypt. In doing so, I am consciously following Jorge Pixley's thesis that the Exodus is the founding event for the people of Israel and the theological key that reveals that "a god who legitimates the oppression of peasants, no matter how solemn its cult, is not the true God of Israel, for the true God is only that One who hears the cries of the oppressed and frees them from their oppressors."<sup>2</sup> I am also adopting Pixley's thesis that while all the societies that enter into the history of biblical Israel can be understood as variants on the tributary system, that throughout the history, the true God is constantly on the side of those who are oppressed by these systems.<sup>3</sup> The true God is the God that is constantly

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<sup>2</sup> Jorge Pixley, *Biblical Israel: A People's History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 12.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 16.



putting the vision of shared abundance before the people. The true God is the God who is revealed through the prophets - the God who hold the kings accountable for the well-being of the people and who is constantly reminding the people that Yahweh is the ultimate King, the ultimate owner, the ultimate host.

So with the story of Joseph in my mind, I move on to examine the story of the Exodus - of God's deliverance of the people from slavery in Egypt. In doing so I am helped by Douglas Meeks' statement that "to be a slave means to be excluded from the household while providing the life conditions for others in the household. Since Joseph, the household of Israel and the household of Jesus Christ have been suspicious of storehouses and storehouse economies."<sup>4</sup> I presuppose this definition of slavery and use it to explore the implications of the Exodus for the history of Israel. I also presume that not only does God deliver the people out of slavery and into the Promised Land, but that God continues to work to deliver the people from the other forms of slavery that emerge in the post-Exodus texts and situations.

### **God's vision of shared abundance for the Promised Land**

The story of Israel is the story of being delivered out of Egypt, being fed the manna in the wilderness - the manna of which there is always enough and everyone is fed according to their need - and delivered into the land of milk and honey where a new vision of society is offered. This vision was radically different from the system in Pharaoh and Joseph's Egypt. More importantly, this vision is radically different from the systems of our own day.

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<sup>4</sup> Douglas Meeks, *God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), p. 80.





Throughout the Hebrew Scriptures Yahweh is portrayed as the Creator and owner of the land. Not only is it asserted and reasserted that Yahweh did indeed create the earth, but it is also emphasised that Yahweh continues to dwell with and reign over Creation. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it." (Ps. 24:1) Secondly, humans, the Israelites, are but guests. Pervading the Hebrew Scriptures is the idea that the Israelites are guests in the land and that Yahweh is their host. As host, Yahweh has delivered the people from slavery, brought them into a land flowing with milk and honey and promised them that, "You shall eat your fill and bless the Lord your God for the good land that he has given you" (Deut. 8:10). Nevertheless, Yahweh makes it very clear that he has not simply signed the land over the Israelites to do with as they wish. While Yahweh has allowed the Israelites to dwell in the land, the land belongs to Yahweh's and Yahweh continues to dwell there with them. As such, there are certain rules that the Israelites must live by. "You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites" (Num. 35:34).

Over and over again, it is emphasised that the Israelites are not simply to create a hierarchical and oppressive society such as the one they knew in Egypt. Rather, the Israelites are to model an alternative society of shared abundance. However, human sin is such that the Israelites will not easily do this. It is for this reason that God gives them a covenant by which they must live. "Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my Covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and holy nation" (Ex. 19:5-6).



The Israelites are not simply to live as other peoples live, oppressing each other and the land. Rather, they are to live by the Covenant. The message is that, if they honour God as owner and host and obey the Covenant, then God's vision of shared abundance will be realised and the people will enjoy God's blessings. However, if the people do not obey God and keep the Covenant, they will all suffer. Instead of shared abundance there will be hoarding, oppression, and want. The Israelites will not have enough food and will be delivered into the hands of their enemies. This contrast is perhaps most clearly and poignantly illustrated in Leviticus 26. Reading this passage, it is stunning just how much God's vision of the abundance that will come from living by the Covenant has to do with food.

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the lands shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land.

Lev. 26:3-5

The passage goes on and talks also of how if they live by the Covenant "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). But then the passage takes a violent turn and there is a very vivid description of what the people will suffer if they they do not observe the commandments. Again, food features very prominently.

I will bring terror on you; consumption and fever that waters the eyes and cause life to pine away. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.

Lev. 26:16

The message is clear, God's vision of abundance can only come when the





people honour God and live by the Covenant. This passage could be seen as a synopsis of the recurring pattern throughout the Hebrew Scriptures of God, as owner and host, putting his vision of shared abundance before the people and reminding them that they must live by the Covenant in order for this vision to be fulfilled. Conversely, God warns what will occur should the people disobey the owner of the land and their host. Eventually, rather than finding wealth and abundance, the people will inevitably meet with persecution, hunger and defeat. The wealth that comes from greed and sinful living is not true abundance and cannot last.

To put the matter in simple terms, God is portrayed as the owner of the land who has chosen to host the Israelites in that land. As owner and host, Yahweh has certain expectations of the guests. When they fail to live up to these expectations, he is angered and he rebukes the people. "I brought you into a plentiful land to eat its fruits and its good things. But when you entered you defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination" (Jer. 2:7). Quite simply, Yahweh expects that the people remember that they are guests and act appropriately. They should not forget this and act as if they owned the place. Rather, as they live in the land, they must always remember that all the abundance that comes to them is a gift from Yahweh. "Do not say to yourself, 'My power and the might of my own hand have gotten me this wealth.' But remember the Lord your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, so that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your ancestors, as he is doing today." (Deut. 8: 17-18). Part of remembering that all wealth comes from God, is recognising that, as such, it is their duty to share this wealth with others so





that all may enjoy God's abundance.

Throughout the scriptures, this message is reiterated by the prophets. For example, the prophets make it abundantly clear that Yahweh does not want to be the type of host that gives some of the guests the finest foods and wines and leaves others to go hungry. He gets upset when the Israelites defile his house in this way. This is not the type of abundance he had envisioned. As Isaiah pronounces:

Ah, you who join house to house, who add field to field,  
until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live  
alone in the midst of the land! The Lord of hosts has sworn  
in my hearing: Surely many houses shall be desolate, large  
and beautiful houses, without inhabitant. For ten acres of  
vineyard shall yield but one bath, and a homer of seed shall  
yield a mere ephah.

Is. 5:8-10

The type of abundance that Yahweh envisions is one in which all share in the land's blessings. Yahweh hopes that instead of fighting with each other and competing for the land's resources, the Israelites shall work together to enjoy and share the land's blessings.

They shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their  
spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword  
against nation, neither shall they learn war any more; but  
they shall all sit under their own vines and under their own  
fig trees, and no one shall make them afraid.

Mic. 4:3-4

This juxtaposition of Isaiah 5 and Micah 4 is a good example of the pattern in Hebrew Scriptures of continued prophetic denunciations of the ways in which the Israelites prevent Yahweh's vision of shared abundance from being realised. As Ronald Sider points out, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures,



“repeatedly God declared that he would destroy the nation of Israel because of two things: its idolatry and its mistreatment of the poor.”<sup>5</sup>

## **Prophetic Denunciations**

In many ways the story of the Hebrew people is a pattern of deliverance and disobedience. While God delivers the people from slavery in Egypt, puts before them a vision of a land filled with milk and honey and brings them into the Promised Land, the people fail to live into God’s vision of shared abundance. Despite God’s call to the people to live, not according to the ways of the other nations, but according to the Law and the Covenant, the people fail to do this. Instead they reject this shared abundance and in its place create hierarchical and oppressive societies where wealth and land are hoarded and not shared. This phenomenon is well illustrated in 1 Samuel 8. It should be kept in mind that archeological evidence indicates that the period in Israel’s history when kings emerged coincided with a period where innovations in agriculture led to farming becoming a less precarious occupation and production becoming more stable. The emergence of this surplus in agricultural production as well as the external threat caused by the Philistines, are believed to be the primary reasons for the creation of a social climate receptive to centralisation and hence to kings.<sup>6</sup>

1 Samuel 8 is the infamous passage when the elders of Israel ask Samuel to “appoint for us, then, a king to govern us like other nations” (1Sam. 8:5). Yahweh is dismayed by this request since He knows that it is an indication that the people have rejected Him as King over them. They have forgotten that

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<sup>5</sup> Sider, *Rich Christians*, p. 118.

<sup>6</sup> Pixley, *Biblical Israel*, p. 27-28.





He is owner and host. They have forgotten that the vision they are supposed to be moving towards is one of shared abundance. They have been lured by the vision of the nations - that of increasing wealth and power. What they have failed to realise, as Samuel's speech to them points out, is that far from bringing them increased power and wealth, having a king will actually bring more poverty and destruction to the peoples as the king will have power and wealth that, by right, should be shared by all.

These will be the ways of the king who will reign over you: he will take your sons and appoint them to his chariots and to be his horsemen, and to run before his chariots; and he will appoint for himself commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and some to plow his ground and to reap his harvest, and to make his implements of war and the equipment of his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive orchards and give them to his courtiers. He will take one tenth of your grain and of your vineyard and give it to his officers and his courtiers. He will take your male and female slaves, and the best of your cattle and donkeys, and put them to his work. He will take one-tenth of your flocks, and you shall be his slaves.

1Sam. 8:10-17

And indeed, in many ways this does turn out to be the case. The Monarchy period is a period of increased centralisation of wealth and power to the detriment of the masses. It was during this period that the tribute system was introduced. Saul, David, Solomon, - with each new King the tribute increased. Saul started the practice of the king accumulating royal lands and was condemned for his greed by Samuel (1 Sam. 15:28, 34-35). David's reign introduced what has become known as Royal Davidic theology - the election of David as the son of Yahweh and defender of the people of God. This theology



was and continues to be a morally ambiguous and a contested theology. While it can be defended on the ground that the Davidic king is accountable to God and responsible for the well-being of the poor, it can be used to support the legitimization of the poor at the hands of the monarchy. There was indeed increased centralisation of power and wealth under David even though David did his best, by waging war and taking booty, to keep the tributes low. It was Solomon who relied the most heavily on tributes from his own people. Not only did Solomon appoint governors to collect tribute from the peasant villages of the twelve tribes, but Solomon introduced tribute in the form of forced labour. It was when Solomon's son Rehoboam increased forced labour and the tax burden ever further that the Northern tribes broke from the house of Judah and created the Northern Kingdom. And while, initially, the Kingdom of Israel had lower taxes, eventually the court luxury that had caused them to splinter off came to characterise them as well. As Bruggemann points out, the story of Israel's monarchy, except during the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah, is a story where "the very land that promised to create space for human joy and freedom became the very source of dehumanising exploitation and oppression."<sup>7</sup>

Much of the reason that the reign of Josiah was more just was because of those of the High Court in Jerusalem who, after the failure of Hezekiah's reforms, were involved in a Deuteronomic reform movement. The Deuteronomic reform movement in many ways rejected Royal Davidic theology. It was a movement to hold the king accountable for the welfare of the people and to put forward the vision that a true king is one who is a faithful servant of Yahweh and obeys the Law, turning away from the temptations of riches, women, and war

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Bruggemann, *The Land*, p. 11.





(Deut. 17: 14-20).

Indeed, throughout the Hebrew Scriptures the message is clear. God's vision of shared abundance is not necessarily incompatible with there being an earthly king. However, this king must always remember and must constantly be reminded that God is the ultimate owner of the land and God is the ultimate host of the people - the host that wishes all to share in the land's abundance. The earthly king, therefore, must be an instrument of God's will and an agent of God's judgment. The earthly king must redistribute wealth so as the widows and the orphans are cared for. This is well illustrated in Isaiah 33. Here it is made clear that Yahweh favours those "who despise the gain of oppression" (Is. 33:15) and that Yahweh has a vision in which "your eyes will see the king in his beauty; they will behold a land that stretches far away. Your mind will muse on the terror; 'Where is the one who counted? Where is the one who weighed the tribute? Where is the one who counted the towers?' (Is. 33:17-18). In Yahweh's vision, instead of the people paying tribute to the king and themselves living in poverty, "prey and spoil in abundance will be divided; even the lame will fall to plundering. And no inhabitant will say, 'I am sick'" (Is. 33:23-24).

Surplus can either be used for the good of the whole community or for the good of the elites. Clearly it is God's wish that the former be true. God's ideal is a *shalom* community in which the king or the dominant powers listen to the prophets and care for the poor. God judges against those communities where the king listens to and is accountable to no one and where the prophet is silenced and the poor are hungry.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p. 101.





Nevertheless, by and large, in the Monarchy period, as continues today, the latter rather than the former was most often the case. The dominant powers did indeed use their power to exact tribute from the people instead of redistributing wealth so that all would share in the abundance. The kings of the monarchy period, like the dominant powers today's world, used their power to rake off the surplus the small farmers had made and to lay claim to their land and labour, the means of production.<sup>9</sup> But, it must be remembered, they were judged by God for doing this. The story of Nahab's vineyard is but one example of this and of the ways in which God judges those, kings included, who hoard land and who fail to keep the Covenant and the Law (I Kings 21).

It must also be remembered that the Monarchy period resulted in the exile. It is surely not a coincidence, therefore, that upon the return there is a renewed commitment to the Torah - a renewed sense of God as owner and host of the land and of the people's call to live according to God's vision of shared abundance for all. It is at the time of the exile and the return that the Law is recorded. It was in this period that the tribute that had been directed to the king was redirected to a tithe for the poor. Deuteronomic reform is taken to its full effect and there are further efforts to hold the kings and the leaders accountable to Yahweh. During the exile, Ezekiel had a vision of there being a time when, "My princes will no longer oppress my people" (Ez. 46:18) and upon the return there were genuine efforts (and struggles) to make this true.

For example, the Book of Nehemiah, and especially the story that is told in Nehemiah 5, is particularly telling of the struggles of the returned community.

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<sup>9</sup> Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism: Drawn from Biblical History, Designed for Political Action* (International Books: Utrecht, the Netherlands, 1995), p. 128-129.



In this chapter we read of how there is a famine and people have to sell their land to, and borrow money from, their richer Jewish brothers and sisters in order to buy food and survive.

Some of the people cried out against their Jewish kin saying, “we must get grain, so that we may eat and stay alive.’ There were also those who said, ‘We are having to pledge our fields, our vineyards, and our houses in order to get grain during the famine.’ And there were those who said, ‘We are having to borrow money on our fields and vineyards to pay the king’s tax’ Neh. 5:2-4

When Nehemiah hears that this is occurring he gets “very angry” (Neh. 5:6) and brings charges against the nobles and the officials. Nehemiah chides them saying that they should not live as the other nations live. He says that they should stop taking interest when they lend money and grain and instead they should, “restore to them, this very day, their fields, their vineyards, their olive orchards, and their houses, and the interest on money, grain, wine, and oil that you have been exacting from them.” (Neh. 5:11). Finally, Nehemiah finishes his dramatic pronouncement by symbolically shaking out the fold of his garment. As he does this he says, “So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise.” (Neh. 5:13).

In this passage Nehemiah is reminding the returned community that they are to live in the land as a Covenant people. By telling them to return the lands to the people, he is hearkening the people to the Law and particularly to the laws against exacting interest (Ex. 22:25-27; Deut. 23:19-20) and to the Jubilee laws about how the land shall not be sold in perpetuity (Lev. 25:23). Nehemiah is calling the people back to God’s vision of shared abundance and pronouncing that they must live into that vision. They shall not live as the other





nations live! What a powerful gesture to shake out his cloak and to say to the community that has recently returned from exile, “So may God shake out everyone from house and from property who does not perform this promise.” (Neh. 5:13). I would suggest that what Nehemiah is doing here is reminding the people that the land is God’s and that they are but guests in it. If they do not honour God and live as dutiful guests, they will be expelled from the land once again.

Nehemiah is a leader who brings a group of Jewish exiles back into the land, rebuilds the walls of Jerusalem and tries to correct some of the abuses that are going on in society during his time. Specifically, as we see in chapter 5, Nehemiah tries to stop the people from charging each other interest and selling each other and each other’s lands. As the story goes, one of the ways that the people respond to Nehemiah’s reforms is by entering into the Covenant and promising to walk and God’s law and to all his commandments (10:28). Among other things, they promise to keep the Covenant, tithe, and offer the first fruits to God. All of these actions could be reinterpreted as the people’s renewed understanding that God is the owner of the land and that they are but his guests. These actions seem to demonstrate that the people are trying, once again, to live out God’s vision of shared abundance. One of the specific ways that the people did this was by codifying and, to some degree, instituting, some of the laws that had been circulating in the oral tradition regarding Sabbath, gleaning, tithing and Jubilee .

### **Sabbath, Gleaning, Tithing and Jubilee**

Most scholars agree that the first creation narrative (Gen. 1) and Leviticus



are the work of the same priestly community. This is supported by the fact that Sabbath figures prominently in both texts. According to the first creation narrative, the Sabbath was instituted by God and has been with the people from the beginning. In Gen. 1 it is written that just as God created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rested on the seventh, so should the people, the animals and the land rest on the seventh day. Furthermore, in Leviticus (usually dated to the post-exilic period) it is codified that not only should there be rest on the seventh day, but there should be a Sabbath year that is a more complete rest of the people, the land and the animals.

The Lord spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai, saying: Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you, the land shall observe a Sabbath for the Lord. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather in their yield; but in the seventh year there shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for the land, a Sabbath for the Lord: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard. You shall not reap the aftergrowth of your harvest or gather the grapes of your unpruned vine: it shall be a year of complete rest for the land. You may eat what the land yields during its Sabbath - you, your male and female slaves, your hired and your bound labourers who live with you; for your livestock also, and for the wild animals in your land all its yield shall be for food.

Lev. 25:1-7

Most biblical scholars agree that both the Sabbath day and the Sabbath year express Israel's belief that the land belongs ultimately to God.<sup>10</sup> In short, the Sabbath has to do with the recognition that God is the Creator and hence the owner of the land. Moreover, I would argue that the Sabbath represents God's

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<sup>10</sup> "Sabbath" *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*, Paul J. Achtemeier ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 1996), p. 955.





efforts to restore God's ownership over the land and, in some degree, to institute God's vision of shared abundance. The Sabbath is a provision against the human tendency to greedily push on, without rest either for the land or for those humans and animals who work the land. This notion is addressed by biblical scholar Walter Bruggemann.

Sabbath is a voice of gift in a frantic coercive self-securing world. Land Sabbath is a reminder that (a) land is not *from* us but is a gift *to* us, and (b) land is not fully given over to our satiation. Land has its own rights over against us and even its own existence. It is in Covenant with us but not totally at our disposal.<sup>11</sup>

What I also find interesting regarding the tradition of Sabbath is that the book of Leviticus makes it clear that if the people fail to keep the Sabbath, God will judge the people and interfere to insure that the land does get its Sabbath rest. No doubt this is a lesson that the people learned from the exile. Leviticus 26:32-35 reads:

I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on our sabbaths when you were living on it.

Clearly the people have come to believe that sabbath for the land is part of God's plan for creation and should be honoured not violated.

Moreover, the Sabbath can also be seen as a way by which God redistributes the wealth so that the earth's abundance is shared. "For six years

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<sup>11</sup> Bruggemann, *The Land*, p. 64.





you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard” (Ex. 23:10). In the seventh year the poor of the land are allowed to go into the fields and glean from what is there. What is there is belongs, after all, not so much to the overseer of the land, but to the owner of the land - to God.

Indeed, this connects with one of the other provisions that Yahweh makes in order to secure the sacred abundance that he envisions - that of gleaning. In the Hebrew Scriptures, because God, not the people, is the owner of the land and because God wishes to be host to all and to provide all with their share of the land’s abundance, there are particular instructions regarding gleaning.

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.

Lev. 19:9

However, it should be noted that gleaning is not the only way by which Yahweh asserts his ownership over the land and tries to redistribute the gifts of the land so that all enjoy the abundance. Tithing is also an important part of the Law and an important way by which abundance is shared. Leviticus makes clear, “all tithes from the land, whether the seed from the ground or the fruit from the tree, are the Lord’s; they are holy to the Lord.” (Lev. 27:30). The laws about tithing are outlined in Deuteronomy (Deut. 14:22-29; 26:12-13). The people are



to give a tenth of their crops to the Levites. The Levites are to redistribute what is gathered and give it to the other Levites (Levites, unlike the rest of the Israelites, do not have land; see Num. 18:23-25), the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows (Deut. 26:13). Another important part of tithing, found in Deuteronomy 14:22-27 outlines having a feast and enjoying and sharing together the abundance that God has provided. As with Sabbath and gleaning, tithing is another way by which the people remember God as owner and host and, as a community, more fully live into God's vision of shared abundance. The feast that the entire community enjoys is a beautiful sign and symbol of this shared abundance.

Indeed, there is much in laws that can be seen as legislation in favour of God's vision of shared abundance for all. For instance, there are clear commandments saying that wealth should be shared and we should not take advantage of another's misfortune to bring gain to ourselves.

If any of you kin fall into difficulty and become dependent on you, you shall support them; they shall live with you as though resident aliens. Do not take interest in advance or otherwise make a profit from them, but fear you God; let them live with you. You shall not lend them your money at interest taken in advance, or provide them food at a profit. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to give you the land of Canaan, to be your God.

Lev. 25:35-38

It should also be noted that in the original Hebrew, the statement against taking interest is even more explicit than in the English translation. In Hebrew the word for 'interest' (*neshek*) literally means that taking interest is like taking a bite out of living flesh.

However, while the observance of the Sabbath, gleaning and tithing and





the prohibitions on taking interest were certainly important ways by which God's wish that the land's abundance be shared were respected and realised, it is perhaps in the Jubilee year that God as owner and God as host is made most clear. In the Jubilee year, slaves are set free, debts are forgiven and land is returned to its original owners . The Jubilee year is, above all, the year when everyone returns to their ancestral lands. Underlying the Jubilee laws is the statement that "the land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me." (Lev. 25:23). As owner of the land and as host in the land, God requires that every fifty years the sinful human structures that tear people from their lands and deliver them into poverty and slavery be reversed and that all people be allowed to return the land that God has gifted to the whole people.

It shall be a jubilee for you; you shall return, *every one of you*, to your property, and every one of you to your family. That fiftieth year shall be a jubilee for you: you shall not sow, or reap the aftergrowth, or harvest the unpruned vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you: you shall eat only what the field itself produces.

Lev. 25:10-12  
(italics mine)

As Jeffrey Fager points out, the Jubilee laws demonstrate that, unlike in the monarchy period when wealth was concentrated in the hands of the few, here there is a firm belief in communal restoration and economic equity. In Leviticus 25 we see the belief that, ultimately, the land is not a commodity to be bought and sold. While a certain amount of this will inevitably go on, it cannot be allowed to go on indefinitely. Indeed, it must be reversed every fifty years and the land must return to its ancestral owners. This is necessary because the



land is “meant to secure for people the means to live independently and free from the fear of poverty.”<sup>12</sup>

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The purpose of this brief exegesis of some of the material contained in the Hebrew Scriptures has been to demonstrate that these texts are a rich source of God’s vision of shared abundance. The Hebrew Scriptures could be summarised, briefly, as the story of Yahweh delivering the people from slavery in Egypt and into the Promised Land. Life in the Promised Land is a continuous struggle to live into God’s vision of shared abundance. However, in making these claims I must reiterate that throughout this exegesis I have assumed that the true God is “that One who hears the cries of the oppressed and frees them from their oppressors.”<sup>13</sup> Moreover, I have assumed that for the made-poor and the oppressed of the biblical context as well as of our modern context, the most liberative texts are those, such as Isaiah 65, which present a utopic vision where the temple is not even mentioned but in which the centre of hope is long life and abundant food. I turn now to the New Testament with a similar lens and with similar assumptions.

## **New Testament**

It is helpful, in making the transition from the Hebrew Scriptures to the New Testament, to return again to Douglas Meeks’ statement that “to be a slave means to be excluded from the household while providing the life conditions for others in the household. Since Joseph, the household of Israel and the household of Jesus Christ have been suspicious of storehouses and

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<sup>12</sup> Jeffrey, Fager. “Land Tenure in the Biblical Jubilee: A Moral World View” *Hebrew Annual Review* 11 (1987) 59-68.

<sup>15</sup> Pixley, *Biblical Israel*, p. 12.





storehouse economies.”<sup>14</sup> While in the above I examined how this was true for the Israelites, I now turn briefly to the New Testament and look at Jesus as another prophet who came to deliver the people from slavery. I will examine how Jesus came as the herald, indeed as the Incarnation, of God’s vision of shared abundance. I will look at how Jesus “emptied himself, taking the form of a *slave*” (Phil. 2: 7 italics mine) in order to model an alternative society in which all are included. I will assume that just as the Hebrew Scriptures can be read as God’s desire that the household of Israel be a household of shared abundance, the New Testament can be seen as Jesus, the Son of God, coming to inaugurate the realm where God, not sinful humans rulers, is King. This has radical economic and political implications. In God’s Kingdom abundance is shared with all rather than hoarded by a few. In the Kingdom of God no one is a slave. All are included at the Lord’s table and all partake of the bounty that is there.

It is important to understand that Jesus lived in a colonial context. The roots of the colonial context of his day date to the Ptolemaic State of the Hellenistic period of 332-167 B.C.E.. During this period Hellenized cities were established and were colonised by both imperial soldiers and civilians. Together these people worked to control the native peoples of the land and to increase agricultural efficiency. A lot of land came to be concentrated in the hands of the elites and more and more people worked the land as labourers rather than as owners. As Pixley explains, this system transformed the native peasants “from free agriculturalists whose immediate superiors were the elders of their villages into wage earners on land in alien hands, with no say in public

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<sup>14</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*, p. 80.





affairs."<sup>15</sup>

This system continued in Jesus's day. The Roman Empire was again at work gaining control over the land and the people so as to extract wealth. Not only did private ownership of land continue but an elaborate system of taxes and tributes was developed. Such structures worked to deny food, land, and sustenance to most of the people of Jesus's day. Joseph Grassi outlines three main ways by which the structures of Jesus's time oppressed the many and favoured the few.<sup>16</sup> First of all, the system of Roman taxation meant that a few people had a lot of wealth while the majority were taxed beyond their ability to provide for themselves and their families. Secondly, the rule of the Herods was also very oppressive, especially to the people of Galilee. It is estimated that Herod probably owned from one-half to two-thirds of the land in Galilee - much of it was acquired by direct confiscation. This meant that a great many of the people whom Jesus served were poor and landless peasants whose survival was far from certain. The third source of oppression that Grassi highlights was the wealthy Israelite landowners.

All of this was fuelled by Rome's notion of *dominium ex iure quiritium*. This meant that they recognised an individual's right to unrestricted control over a piece of land and the air or sky above it.<sup>17</sup> Instead of the Israelite's idea that the earth belongs to Yahweh and the people are but strangers and sojourners on it, a very individual notion of land ownership was established. Therefore, instead of being a source of abundance for all people, the land now becomes

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<sup>15</sup> Pixley, *Biblical Israel*, p. 128.

<sup>16</sup> Joseph Grassi, *Broken Bread and Broken Bodies*, (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985) p. 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*, p. 106.



property and becomes an instrument of domination that provides the few with the ability to exploit the many. Land is private property and there are no measures to redistribute either land, food, or wealth.

It is into this kingdom of Hellenized cities and private ownership of land that Jesus comes and inaugurates the Kingdom of God. Jesus models an alternative society even under the yoke of Roman domination. He opposes these structures and offers a new mode of community in which all are included and all are fed. He raises up the downtrodden, proclaims that “the Kingdom of God is among you” (Lk. 17:21), and lives with them an alternative to the existing order. He assures them that the day coming when the last shall instead be first (Mt. 19:30). Indeed, Jesus’s entire life and ministry can be seen as him discrediting the Roman system and all other exploitative and power-hungry systems. As he says to the disciples in Matthew’s gospel, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mt. 20:24-28). Statements such as this one summarise a whole political-economic analysis that Rome and its accomplices are illegitimate and represent nothing but oppression and violent exploitation.<sup>18</sup>

While Jesus’s entire life and ministry can be interpreted as his demonstrating God’s opposition to the exploitative structures of the Empire and his modelling an alternative order, the cleansing of the temple is one of the places where this is made most explicit. Tissa Balasuriya, a Sri Lankan

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<sup>18</sup> Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, p. 187.





theologian, urges a post-colonial analysis of the cleansing of the temple and highlights that “the temple was guarded by the Roman soldiers as a central institution of the whole socio-political edifice of their colonial exploitation.”<sup>19</sup> Moreover, I would say that Duchrow is right to point out that by this action Jesus “continues the exilic and post-exilic attempts to set Israel free from the unholy alliance of royal court and state priesthood by lifting the double tribute - though these attempts were increasingly thwarted by the priestly aristocracy in Jerusalem.”<sup>20</sup> Clearly Jesus stood in the tradition of the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures who were concerned to free the people from systems that stockpile the wealth that should rightly be distributed among all God’s people. Like Ezekiel, Jesus had a vision of a society in which “My princes will no longer oppress my people” (Ez. 46:18). Whereas the Roman Empire was concerned with the accumulation of power and wealth, Jesus inaugurates the Kingdom of God where power and wealth, food and drink, healing and love are shared so that all may enjoy God’s abundance.

Jesus continuously challenges the eating practices of his day which deny food to so many and privilege the few. Right from the beginning, in the Magnificat, Jesus is identified as a prophet who announces the *shalom* vision of God where power is redistributed and the hungry are fed (Luke 1:52-53). This does indeed turn out to be the case. “Blessed are you poor, for yours is the Kingdom of God. Blessed are you that hunger now, for you shall be satisfied. But woe to you that are rich, for you have received your consolation. Woe to you that are full now, for you shall hunger. (Luke 6:20-21 and 24-25).

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<sup>19</sup> Tissa Balysuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, p. 189.



Jesus announces a radical inversion of the landed and the landless. He clearly sees himself as a part of the prophetic tradition of announcing Jubilee (Luke 14:18-19). However, one of the most succinct examples of Jesus's inversion of the landed and the landless is the parable of the rich fool.

Then he told them a parable: "The land of a rich man produced abundantly. And he thought to himself, 'What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?' Then he said, 'I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God."

Luke 12:16-21

I am interested in this parable for many reasons, not the least of which is that I believe that while the rich fool comes to a different end than does Joseph, the rich fool stores and hoards wealth in a way not dissimilar to Joseph (Gen. 41:37-49). I think that with this parable Jesus provides yet another reminder that it is God's will that food be shared, not hoarded.

Sharing food is undoubtedly at the centre of Jesus' life and mission. Robert Karris exemplifies this well with his study of the role of food in Jesus' ministry in the Gospel of Luke. He concludes that there are two overriding food themes in Luke. First, Jesus is the one through whom God feeds God's hungry creation. It is Jesus who brings both physical and spiritual food to the hungry and downtrodden of the world. In Jesus, God seeks out those who are in need, invites them to his table, fills their need and commissions them to go out and love and feed others. Secondly, Jesus is God's messenger of justice who is





executed for the very fact that he shares food with everyone without exception.<sup>21</sup> The dominant society, with all its rules as to who can and cannot eat with who and with a vested interest in the structures and institutions that feed the few and keep the many hungry, are so threatened by this man and his message and actions that they have him killed.

Indeed, not only in Luke, but throughout the gospels, Jesus inaugurates a new society in which all are invited to God's table. He continuously calls his disciples and followers to feed the hungry and redistribute God's abundance. He tells them that when they hold a banquet they are not to invite their friends and neighbours but the poor, the crippled and the lame (Luke 14:12-13). He himself transgresses social boundaries and eats with sinners and tax collectors. He points towards the Kingdom where "people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last" (Luke 13:29-30). And Jesus feeds people. Just as God provided the manna in the wilderness, Jesus also feeds the people in the wilderness (Mark 6:52; 8:19-21). However, while the manna in the wilderness was for the chosen people, the bread that Jesus provides is for all people. As Donald Senior points out, in the Gospel of Mark the first feeding miracle is in Jewish territory and the second is in Gentile territory. This fact, combined with the symbolism of the use of numbers in these passages, demonstrates the Markan community's profound understanding of Jesus's mission to feed all people, Jews and Gentiles alike.

"When I broke the five loaves for the five thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" They

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<sup>21</sup> Robert Karris, *Luke Artist and Theologian* pp. 49-51 as cited by Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Wilmington: Mich  el Glazier, 1988), p. 106.





said to him, "Twelve." "And the seven for the four thousand, how many baskets full of broken pieces did you collect?" And they said to him, "Seven." Then he said to them, "Do you not yet understand?"

Mark 8:19-21

Senior points out that the numbers five and twelve typically refer to Israel, while four and seven are universal numbers that refer to the whole world.<sup>22</sup> Clearly it is Jesus's vision that *all people* share in God's abundance.

It should also be noted that in the feeding miracles as well as at the Last supper, Jesus takes bread, gives thanks for it and/or blesses it <sup>23</sup> and distributes it. Quite simply, these actions could be seen as Jesus, taking the gifts of God's creation, acknowledging that they are from God by giving God thanks for them and then, most importantly, sharing them with God's people. At a simple level, these actions could be interpreted as Jesus acknowledging God as owner and host and acknowledging our call as humans to share God's bread together here on earth. Together, these actions demonstrate Jesus's profound understanding that all food comes from God and that we are called to share it with each other. Indeed, Jesus's entire life and ministry reflects the understanding, already seen in the Hebrew Scriptures, that God is the ultimate source of bread and nourishment and that it is God's will that all be fed. These actions of Jesus, performed in both the feeding miracles and the Last Supper, are continued in the Church's Eucharistic celebrations to this day.

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<sup>22</sup> D. Senior, "The Eucharist in Mark: Mission, Reconciliation, Hope," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 12 (1982) 67-72 as cited by Grassi, *Loaves and Fishes* (Collegiville: The Liturgical Press, 1991), p. 28-29.

<sup>23</sup> Grassi has done important work outlining how in the gospels Jesus alternates between blessing the bread and giving thanks for it. For example, in Mark's gospel, in the two feeding miracles, in the one for the Jews, Jesus blesses the bread while in the one for the Gentiles, he gives thanks for the bread. Similarly, in the account of the Last Supper Jesus blesses the bread and gives thanks for the cup. See Grassi, *Loaves and Fishes*, p. 42.



Jesus' life, death and resurrection provided a political and economic alternative to the Hellenistic system and inaugurate a community in which wealth was redistributed and people were fed. In the Acts of the Apostles there are many accounts of the early Christian community not only sharing their wealth, but using it to feed the community. There is even an account of the disciples sending money for the Christians suffering from the famine in Judea (Acts 11:29-30). The early Christian communities that are addressed in Paul's epistles also clearly identify themselves as alternatives to the dominant model. In these communities, people of all classes, races, and sexes came together to model a community of abundant life. The poor and the downtrodden had a special role in these communities.

Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, so that no one might boast in the presence of God. 1 Cor. 1:26-29

Clearly these communities saw themselves in opposition to the Roman system they existed within. Whereas the dominant culture valued the accumulation of wealth by individuals, the early Christian communities were communities where wealth, and especially food, was shared. Speaking of the collection for Christians at Jerusalem, Paul writes the following.

[God] who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness. You will be enriched in every way for your great generosity, which will produce thanksgiving to God through us; for the rendering of this ministry not only supplies the needs of the saints but also





overflows with many thanksgivings to God. Through the testing of this ministry you glorify God by your obedience to the confession of the gospel of Christ and by the generosity of your sharing with them and with all others, while they long for you and pray for you because of the surpassing grace of God that he has given you. Thanks be to God for this indescribable gift!

2 Cor. 9:10-15

Clearly Paul believes that as Christians we share with each other out of the bounty that we have been given by God. God's vision of shared abundance will be realised when Christians learn to share joyfully with each other.

In Paul's letter to the Corinthians there is also the famous passage where the people there are chastised for partaking of the supper unworthily (1 Cor. 11:17-34). Paul is concerned that the Eucharist is defamed when it is not equally shared in the community of faith. If the Christian community is truly going to model an alternative to the exclusive Roman system, it must be a community in which all are included and all partake of the abundance and recognise each other's rightful claim to the abundance.

Indeed, it should be noted that the word Paul uses for church, *ekklesia*, itself has political connotations and itself is a rejection of the Roman system. Duchrow explicates the term well.

In secular Greek it denotes the assembly of the free men of a city republic, e.g. Athens. In the Jewish usage of the Greek Bible (Septuagint) it denotes the institution of the People's Assembly of free peasants in early Israel (*qahal YHWH*), which became popular again after the Exile as the place where the whole people made important decisions. . . Since the synagogue communities of the Jewish diaspora at the time did not use this term, and since on the other hand Paul does not use the word 'synagogue' for Christian communities, it is clear that this choice of term must be



deliberate. In other words, in order to characterise the 'church' Paul goes back consciously to the initiatives by which Israel tried to build an egalitarian society in contrast to the tributary kingship system - precisely in order to be the witness people of the liberating God.<sup>24</sup>

In a very direct way, Paul sees the early Christian communities as very real alternatives to the oppressive tributary system of the Roman Empire. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, he sees these systems as contrary to God's vision of shared abundance.

While there is debate concerning the devotion and the extent to which the early Christian communities managed to incarnate an alternative to the dominant Roman system (see Rom. 13), there is evidence that they did, to some degree, manage to model an alternative community for quite some time - at least until the time of Constantine. As the Book of Revelation demonstrates, the community of John of Damascus most definitely saw itself in opposition to the Roman system. Moreover, in the *Didache* (first century) we read, "Share everything with your brother. Do not say, 'It is private property.' For if you share what is everlasting, you should be that much more willing to share things which do not last."<sup>25</sup> The life, death and resurrection of Jesus do indeed manage to establish an *ekklesia*, a new fellowship where all are included and all participate in God's abundant life. Until the Kingdom comes, on earth as it is in heaven, this *ekklesia* is to be a sign and foretaste of the abundance to come.

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When facing the bleak and daunting task of trying to live in a world where

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<sup>24</sup> Ulrich Duchrow, *Alternatives to Global Capitalism*, p. 196.

<sup>25</sup> *Didache*, as cited by Tissa Balysuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 25.





790 million people are hungry and do not have food security, I think that it is important for those of us who stand within the Christian tradition to return to both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament and to see what resources our tradition can offer us in our struggle to overcome this injustice. For, as I hope that this brief work of exegesis has been able to demonstrate, it is here that we find our vision and our hope. It is here that we are reminded that in our tradition the land is God's and God's vision for both the land and the people is shared abundance. It is here that we are assured that we are not just going crazy - it is indeed unjust and wrong that so many people are left crying out for food while the elites enjoy a lavish banquet at the made-poor's expense. It is here that we are reminded that we cannot profess belief in God and ignore the sufferings of the made-poor and the hungry. It is here that we are offered a glimpse of a world in which all are invited into the household and all eat.

Earlier this century Archbishop William Temple wrote that it is the duty of the Church and its members to work out the social principles that are present in the Gospel and to offer them to the distracted world. He insisted that it is the call and the duty of Christians to "go into the arena of industrial and political life, carrying these principles with us, and applying them to the actual facts and problems to the best of our ability."<sup>26</sup> As Temple explained, surely the first and foremost Gospel principle is that society must be organised around the welfare of the whole, "and this must apply as much to nations as to individuals."<sup>27</sup> More specifically, Temple insisted that "the economic structure of the Kingdom will be one which will insist upon the responsibility of the individual to the community

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<sup>26</sup> William Temple, *Personal Religion and the Life of Fellowship*, (London: Ongmans, Green and Co., 1926), p. 76.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 77.





and the responsibility of the community for the individual.”<sup>28</sup> However, while Temple was firm that there are general principles of conduct that can be deduced from the conception of the Kingdom found in the gospels, Temple was also very much aware that the Church could not simply map out the path to the Kingdom for humanity. While the Church can hold the ideals of the Gospel before society, it cannot offer concrete solutions. For example, Temple insisted that the Church should concern itself with, should interfere with, all aspects of life, including the political. Nevertheless, he was also clear that the Church must keep a healthy distance from the particular entanglements of politics. Temple’s entire life can be seen as him walking this very fine line. His position is well summarised in his early writings.

But the Church and the official representatives of the Church must keep themselves free from the entanglements of party politics. There will come times when they should support or resist a specific measure; but they should not take any share in the strife of parties. Their business is something far more fundamental and important; it is the formation of that mind and temper in the whole community which will lead to wholesome legislation by any party and all parties.<sup>29</sup>

In his later writings he states the same point more succinctly. “The Church is committed to the everlasting Gospel and to the Creeds which formulate it; it must never commit itself to an ephemeral programme of detailed action.”<sup>30</sup> He insists that the duty of the Church is not to sketch a perfect social order.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. p. 79.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid. p. 89-90.

<sup>30</sup> William Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, (Reading: Shephard-Walwyn, 1987 [originally published 1942]), p. 41.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 59.



Rather, the Church should impact society by announcing the principles of the Gospel and highlighting where society is in conflict with them in order to work to reorder society in accordance with them.<sup>32</sup>

I think that this is well said and that there is much wisdom in Temple's words. Faced with the problem of world hunger, as outlined in the first chapter, I have found it helpful, in this second chapter, to revisit the Scriptures in order to become more familiar and have a deeper understanding of the principles that are there. My hope is that having done this I will be able to, in the third and final chapter, re-enter the 'arena of industrial and political life' of, in this case, world agriculture at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and offer both a prophetic voice and an alternative vision. I shall endeavour to be engaged in the 'fundamental and important' work of "the formation of that mind and temper in the whole community which will lead to wholesome legislation by any party and all parties."<sup>33</sup> I am particularly interested in helping instil this vision of shared abundance into the minds and tempers of my brothers and sisters in Christ. For I believe that faced with the problem of world hunger, while the Church should not be committed to or expected to outline any one program of action, the Church can and should have the following six inter-related responses. First of all, as I have made clear, the Church should offer a vision of an alternative community. Secondly, as I also suggested above, the Church should offer a prophetic critique, if not a theo-ethical analysis, of the present system. Thirdly, the Church should be in compassionate solidarity with all those who are hungry and do not have food security. As a fourth step, the Church should foster the

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid. p. 58.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid. p. 89-90.





social capital necessary to mobilise people to address the issues of hunger and food security. Following this, as a fifth step, the Church should also continue to network with other people and institutions who are also working on issues of hunger food security. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Church should not only attend to the immediate needs of the made-poor and the hungry, but the Church should model, through its own actions and institutions, an alternative to the existing system. I hope that, in the third and final chapter, I can suggest some ways by which the Church may begin to do all six of these things.



## Chapter 3

### Towards an Alternative Economy

In his work, God the Economist: The Doctrine of God and Political Economy, Meeks provides the useful and insightful reminder that “the Greek word from which we derive *economy*, *oikonomia*, is a compound of *oikos*, household, and *nomos*, law or management. *Economy* means literally ‘the law or the management of the household.’ Household is connected with the production, distribution, and consumption of the necessities of life.”<sup>1</sup> Meeks’ thesis is that the Bible provides a vision of an economy in which the domination that prevents some from having access to “what they need in order to keep their calling to be God’s image, child, disciple and friend”<sup>2</sup> is eliminated. Meeks asserts that in God’s household no one is to be a slave, no one is to be “excluded from the household while providing the life conditions for others in the household.”<sup>3</sup>

A powerful vision indeed! However, as the first chapter illustrated, the current capitalist economy is very far away from such a vision and has, in fact, delivered most of the world’s peoples into slavery. Globally, most of the population is not living out God’s vision of shared abundance in the Promised Land. Rather, they are living in systems not unlike the ones the Hebrew people knew in Egypt. Walter Brueggemann is right to point out that just as the Hebrew people “became slaves not by whips and brutality, however, but by the slow erosion of their economic independence through tax and land policies that

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<sup>1</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, p. 80.



enforced the monopoly which claimed all the land,"<sup>4</sup> so have so many twenty-first century people and their governments been lured into an analogous kind of slavery by capitalism.

Indeed, I see an alarming number of parallels between the situations reflected in the biblical texts and today's situation. For example, there are frightening parallels between the oppression suffered in the Monarchy period and the oppression people suffer under globalisation today. Both the monarchy and globalisation were adopted because the people mistakenly believed that these systems would bring them more wealth, power and prosperity. However, the economic and political powers in today's world, like the kings of the monarchy period, have used these systems to rake off the surplus that small farmers produce and to claim their land and labour. As such, the biblical prophecies against the monarchy and the vision of a time when "My princes will no longer oppress my people" (Ez. 46:18) are relevant and powerful today as in biblical times.

I would like, therefore, to conclude this thesis with the bold assertion that the capitalist economy - the economy of globalisation, free trade, intellectual property rights and the like, the economy that we as early twenty-first century people know and are complicit with - must be rejected in favour of a economy of life, an economy where no one is a slave and where all are included and all eat. In theological language, I assert that this economy will have as its basis the assumption that the land belongs to God and that we and all of Creation are the guests at God's banquet of shared abundance.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *Interpretation and Obedience: From Faithful Reading to Faithful Living* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 264.





While the Bible certainly cannot provide a blueprint for action as we make efforts to move from a capitalist economy to an economy of shared abundance, as I suggested at the end of the second chapter, I do maintain that many of the principles that are contained within the biblical texts are foundational for envisioning such an economy. I am convinced that it is both helpful and necessary to hold the capitalist system accountable to the biblical vision of shared abundance and to show how the capitalist system falls short. Nevertheless, this is not to say that it is *only* the biblical vision that has the power to recreate society into a community of shared abundance. While the Christian tradition and community is the one that I stand within as I engage critically with the world, and while it is in the Christian tradition that I find an alternative vision for society, I am well aware that there are many non-Christian people and communities who are also working towards an alternative vision of shared abundance. Fortunately, we are called to be loyal not to the Christian tradition as such, but rather to the vision of shared abundance that the tradition envisions. Throughout the next section, therefore, I will give numerous examples of both Christians and non-Christians whom I believe are working from and for an alternative vision. It is my experience that prophetic witnesses can come both from within the tradition and from outside voices.

At the end of the first chapter I suggested that the present industries of agribusiness and biotechnology exist within the capitalist system's assumptions of:

- 1) stark individualism
- 2) competition



3) protection of the right of the few to possess property

4) a vision of unlimited progress and growth and so-called efficiency

In this chapter I shall demonstrate that the above four assumptions run counter to any sort of idea of the land being God's. Furthermore, I shall suggest that the shared abundance that God envisions for God's land can only exist when we live into God's economy, an economy that is based on:

1) community

2) cooperation and sharing

3) protection of all people's, especially the made-poor and marginalised, right to access the abundance of Creation

4) a wholistic and relational vision of Creation's integrity

My work suggests that each of these four concepts can be inferred from the biblical texts and that they would need to be a part of any economy that sought to live into God's vision of shared abundance. In the remainder of this chapter I will compare and contrast each of these four pairs in light of the modern agricultural system. My intent is to offer an evocative alternative vision and to begin to explore what some of implications of embracing this vision of shared abundance would be for the present capitalist system.

Having said this, I should acknowledge that while there have been efforts by Christians, especially in Latin American countries, to offer socialism as a suitable alternative to capitalism, I am not convinced by these arguments. Both capitalism and socialism are based on the logic of maximum production. They differ only in who has control over the means of production. Neither system has proved capable of sharing or distributing the abundance produced. As such, I





am attached to neither system but only to God's vision of shared abundance.

### **1. The stark individualism of the capitalist economy as opposed to a community centered economy of shared abundance**

It is hardly very radical to say that capitalism is an individualistic ideology. First of all, capitalism assumes a view of the self as an atomistic 'individual.' Secondly, capitalism assumes a Hobbesian view of society as nothing but a collection of individuals. Finally, capitalism is self-referential always leading individuals back to the question, "What does this mean for me? How will I benefit or lose?" Given these four assumptions, capitalism simply cannot create any sense of shared abundance. Capitalism is based on individual property rights and the individual's capital. In the capitalist system an individual's capital has the *de-facto* power to over-rule and over-ride the needs and desires of entire communities. In the capitalist system resources are only shared when *individuals* choose to give to others in philanthropic acts. There are clear boundaries between individuals. The rights of individuals are highly emphasised while there is little or no mention of people's responsibilities to their communities. Nations act out these same individualistic capitalist assumptions in the form of Imperialism and colonialism. As such, just as there are radical discrepancies in wealth between individuals, there are also radical discrepancies in wealth between nations.

Because of its radical individualism the efforts of the capitalist system to create a social safety net fail. For example, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed by a great number of so-called capitalist countries, declares that all people have a fundamental right to, among other things, food.

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for



the health and well-being of himself [or herself] and of his [or her] family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widow-hood old age, or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his [or her] control.<sup>5</sup>

Needless to say this statement has not been made into reality. I would argue that much of the reason for this is that the Declaration operates within an individualistic framework. The Declaration emphasises the rights of individuals without making any mention of the responsibilities of individuals, communities and governments to secure these rights for all people. The system encourages individuals to claim their rights without concurrently fostering an environment in which communities and nations see it as their responsibility to take steps to deliver these rights to other people.

Capitalism's ability to concentrate land, resources, capital and *food* in the hands of individuals cannot be reversed by stop-gap measures such as welfare programs and food aid. It is ludicrous to create structures that leave an increasing number of people and nations hungry and then to assume that this problem will be redressed when the people who have benefited from these structures give away some of their gains in the form of charity. It is time to recognise that the individualistic capitalist system is incompatible with a vision of shared abundance and to, instead of instituting stop-gap redistribution measures, embrace structural change as a way of moving towards a true community of shared abundance.

As I hope the second chapter has made clear, both the Hebrew

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<sup>5</sup> United Nations Department of Public Information. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: United Nations, 1993).





Scriptures and the New Testament push us towards a vision of shared abundance - a vision that, instead of being individualistic, is radically communal. In the biblical world view the community, not the individual is the basic unit. Inter-dependence, not independence and boundaries, are valued. Whereas in the capitalist system individuals make utilitarian contracts with each other, in God's economy of shared abundance the entire community is covenanted with each other, with the land, and with God. While the capitalist system concerns itself with and seeks to protect and enhance the abundance that an individual possesses, in God's economy such behaviour is condemned and the concern is to share the abundance among all God's people - especially among those who are poor and disenfranchised. "Therefore because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have build houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine" (Amos 5:11). Whereas the capitalist economy encourages each person to work to satisfy their own needs and desires offering the false reassurance that the needs and sufferings of our neighbours will be taken care of by the mythic trickle down effect, God condemns such behaviour and reminds the people that true abundance will only come when we put aside our desires for individual gain and live in true community with each other. Such a vision of community is poetically expressed in Isaiah 58:9-14.

If you remove the yoke from among you, the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil, if you offer your food to the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, then your light shall rise in the darkness and your gloom be like the noonday. The LORD will guide you continually, and satisfy your needs in parched places, and make your bones strong;





and you shall be like a watered garden, like a spring of water, whose waters never fail. Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt; you shall raise up the foundations of many generations; you shall be called the repairer of the breach, the restorer of the streets to live in.

As Isaiah so beautifully expresses, in God's world, abundance and prosperity will come to all when individuals put aside their selfishness and greed and work together to meet each others needs. A similar vision is offered in the New Testament. As Meeks explains, "Jesus seeks to live life in a new community in which the needs of one person are met by the gifts of others, where there is a common sharing of possessions according to need, where a supportive community suffers and rejoices together, and where one can trust God without fear or anxiety over earthly needs."<sup>6</sup> Whereas the capitalist system is radically individualistic, the Bible offers a vision of a world that is radically communal and that takes into account and cares for the needs of all.

Because the Christian Church stands within a radical tradition of community, it should not be surprising that church organizations, churches, and individual Christians have been and continue to be instrumental in trying to transform the political and economic institutions of our day so that the world is closer to being a community of shared abundance. For example, in April 1999, representatives of 57 civil society organisation from Africa, Asia, Latin America, North America and Europe were gathered together by APRODEV (the Association of World Council of Churches-related Development Organisations in Europe ) for a conference on Trade and Hunger. The result of this conference was a document called the Zeist Declaration. The complete

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<sup>6</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*, p. 115.



declaration is given in the appendix. As can be seen, it is a very well-thought-through declaration. I am convinced that in many ways it manages to embrace God's vision of shared abundance. In the closing words of the Declaration the signatories sum up their intentions: "We commit ourselves to strive relentlessly, through advocacy, empowerment and networking to achieve sustainable agricultural development, economic justice for the poor and food security for all."<sup>7</sup> These intentions transcend the individualism of capitalism and globalisation and point towards a community of shared abundance.

What is worth noticing is that the signatories have made the fundamental realisation that to achieve these goals the current system of neo-liberalism and globalisation is going to have to be replaced with a very different system. As such, in the body document the signatories argue for "a radical change in the process of globalisation" which will, in turn, "require a major reform in the international financial architecture and in trade agreements in order to achieve a fairer balance of power between the rich and poor nations." They argue that the "IMF and World Bank should abolish conditionalities demanding governments to liberalise agricultural and other imports, and allow protection of security and domestic economy." They "demand that the member states of the WTO freeze further negotiations for at least two years in order to conduct a comprehensive impact assessment of the Agreement on Agriculture. . . . During this period, developing countries should have the right to support their food production regardless of the limitations in the AoA."<sup>8</sup> While the declaration does not go so far as to question the basic tenets of our capitalist system and instead

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<sup>7</sup> The Zeist Declaration on Trade Liberalisation and the Right to Food April. 1999 APRODEV  
[www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hungry992](http://www.oneworld.org/aprodev/hungry992)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.





offers suggestions for reform within the current capitalist system, the extent and particularity of their demands for reform demonstrate that the signatories have realised that the current system of globalisation must be rejected if we are going to achieve food security for all people. For example, the declaration argues that instead of requiring all countries, including poor and food insecure countries, to liberalise agriculture and join globalisation, the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO should help countries protect and bolster their own agricultural industries and achieve food security and food sovereignty. Clearly the vision espoused by the Zeist document is a communal and not an individual vision. In such a vision, the rights of communities to produce, distribute and consume food take precedence over the rights of an individual's capital. Such a vision has much more in common with the vision of the Promised Land where "My princes will no longer oppress my people" (Ez. 46:18) and "they shall all sit under their own vines and their own fig trees and no one will make them afraid" (Mic. 4:4) than with the situation in Egypt or under the rule of oppressive rulers in Israel where the people "though hungry, they carry the sheaves; between their terraces they press out oil; they tread the wine presses, but suffer thirst" (Job. 24: 11).

However, not only are church related non-governmental organisations the world over working against capitalism and towards a more communal vision, some countries and governments are beginning to question the logic of capitalism and seek out a new vision. For example, the government of India has recently argued that a purely market-orientated approach to agriculture is unwarranted. India has argued instead for a "market-plus" approach that takes



into account non-trade concerns such as the livelihood of the agrarian peasantry and the production of sufficient food to meet domestic needs.<sup>9</sup> No doubt what India is reacting to is not only the individualistic bent of capitalism, but the neo-colonialism of the modern capitalist system. In face of the neo-colonial economic structures that are focused on commodifying all people and all of Creation, India is holding fast to a more communal vision in which the rights, customs and traditions of its people are respected and the market is tempered. Rather than turning over all of its food production to the so-called market-logic, India is arguing that some of the more traditional methods of production and distribution need to be maintained so that the peasants, the farmers and the poor enjoy a higher degree of food security. I would argue that India has recognised that the capitalist system is very good at making a limited number of *individuals* very wealthy, it is also prone to making a large number of people slaves. As such, a more communal vision in which all are included in the household/economy is needed.

Indeed, there is a rising tide of voices protesting against the individualistic bent of capitalism and offering a more community centered vision. The November 1999 WTO talks in Seattle were a good illustration of the number and diversity of these voices. Not only did a good number of Third World governments, including India, bring questions and reservations about both the WTO and modern capitalism and globalisation generally, but hundreds of thousands of protesters from the world over came to express their discontent with the current system also. While these protesters came from different

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<sup>9</sup> Chakravarthi Raghavan, "Agriculture: India for a "market-plus" approach" *Third World Network* Dec. 1998, [www.twinside.org.sg](http://www.twinside.org.sg)



countries and backgrounds (trade unionists, environmentalists, feminists, etc.) and while they had different critiques of and concerns with the WTO, I would argue that what united them was their view that while globalisation has done an admirable job of securing vast amounts of wealth for a few individuals, it was working to the detriment of communities. I would argue that what most of the protesters in Seattle were doing was protesting the individualistic bent of the modern economic system and working to protect their communities from the onslaughts of this system. Indeed, I suggest that many of the protesters were prophetic voices bringing the voices of the made-poor, the marginalised, the outcast, the widows, and the orphans, before the world leaders and trying to hold the leaders accountable. Just as the prophet Isaiah pronounced against those “who join house to house, who add field to field, until there is room for no one but you, and you are left to live alone in the midst of the land” (Is. 5:8), the protesters in Seattle were also pronouncing judgments against those who were blinded by individual gain and wealth. These prophetic voices were calling our leaders back to a vision where, instead of being slaves to capitalism and to globalisation:

They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

Is. 65:22

The protesters in Seattle provided an important witness. As Christians it is our call to stand in solidarity with those who are opposing the individualistic bent of globalisation and strive to create more authentic communities. We too





must be prophetic witnesses to the fact that it should not be up to individual people and to individual countries to find ways to feed their families and citizens *within the bounds of the current system*. Instead, it is up to all of us to work to create an *alternative system*. For example, there is an internal debate in the WTO about the limited amount of 'Special and Differential' treatment that the WTO allows developing countries in the agricultural realm. This 'Special and Differential' treatment has come about because at some level the WTO recognises that food is such a basic need that some measures need to be taken to ensure that even the most made-poor countries are guaranteed some access to it. However, as Christians we must be prophetic witnesses to the fact that no amount of 'Special and Differential' treatment, *within the current individualistic capitalist system*, is going to provide food security for the world's poor people. For all to be fed we are going to have to reexamine the capitalist system's individualistic bias and acknowledge that we need a new system entirely. Such a system is going to have to look a lot more like God's economy and a lot less like the capitalist economy. The WTO is going to have to see itself not as an institution that furthers the interests of TNCs by globalising all trade, but as an institution that helps ensure that all people have access to the earth's abundance and that all people are included in the household that is our global economy. The Church can help in this struggle not only by witnessing to the injustices of the present system, but by modelling communities in which people look after each other's needs. In these communities it should be recognised that what we have is a gift from God that belongs not to any individual person or country, or institution, but to us all.



One of the main ways by which churches are currently modelling such alternative communities is by sharing food with those in need through soup kitchens, food banks, feeding programs and international food aid programs. I do not mean to discredit either the important witness that these services provide, or the importance and urgency of this work for the made-poor and the hungry themselves. Nevertheless, as I hope this section has emphasised, the Church must concurrently and, even more importantly, work to change the very structures that necessitate the creation of these charities in the first place.

I am heartened by the stories of churches not only in the Third World, but in the First World as well, including right here in the Boston area, who are involved in issues of local community food security. These stories show that churches can and should be involved in helping promote food security in their local communities. Many churches have both the land and the volunteer labour to get involved in community garden projects. These projects are especially beneficial in poor neighbourhoods where the cost of fresh fruits and vegetables may otherwise be prohibitive. These projects are also, in both rich and poor neighbourhoods, one of the only ways to guarantee people access to organic produce. More importantly, these projects allow local communities to grow, share and enjoy food together. Through these projects, churches are a visible witness of an alternative vision to their communities.

Churches are also involved in rural communities. For example, the Upper Sand Mountain United Methodist Church Lager Parish in Alabama is involved in a Sowing Seeds program that trains low-income rural families and youth in





micro-enterprise farming.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the the help of the Presiding Bishop's Fund of the Episcopal Church, the Diocese of Rokon in Sudan is trying to help the people of its community overcome food shortages by providing farming tools, oxen and seeds. All of these efforts are of enormous import since the kingdom will come not only when there are enough food programs to feed all those who have been excluded from the competitive world economy, but when the world embraces God's economy and all are included in the household and all join in the feast.

## **2. The competition of the capitalist economy as opposed to the cooperation and sharing of God's economy**

As we move from the individualism of capitalism towards the community centered vision of God's economy, we will, at the same time, also need to move away from our paradigm of competition and towards a paradigm of cooperation. For while it should be axiomatic that competition is an exclusionary principle and will inevitably lead to less, not more, people being fed, the economic and political powers in the world today are very intent on propagating the myth that a competitive system includes everyone and provides everyone with an equal opportunity to participate in the global economy. This is the very logic of globalisation. However, it is most certainly false logic. Douglas Meeks provides a useful analysis of so-called market logic when he explains that there are two major problems with it. "The first is the pretension of the market logic when it is considered a complete system for the distribution of all social goods. . . The second has to do with the way the privileges of capital bring about domination

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<sup>10</sup> Laura McCullough, "The community food security movement," *The Witness*, Jan/Feb, 1999, p. 12.



in the market despite the official claims that the market is free of domination.”<sup>11</sup> Of course Meeks is right. Anyone who has ever watched a competitive sporting event, such as, say, the National hockey League (NHL) playoffs, knows that the logic of competition is to exclude more and more people. First of all, a good number of people are excluded from the onset. Teams must qualify to compete in the playoffs by obtaining enough points in the regular season. Once the playoffs are underway, with each round more and more people are excluded and, at the end, all that is left is one winner. Globalisation operates with similar logic with similar results. One must qualify to compete in globalisation by having the necessary amount of capital. Also, like in a hockey tournament, only those who ‘succeed’ are allowed to compete again. As a result, with each passing day, less and less people remain in the competition. The widening gap between the rich and the poor and the increasing concentration of resources and capital in the hands of a very few TNCs evidence this phenomenon all too clearly.

However, while the logic of capitalism is competitive and exclusive, the Bible models a system that is, by nature, cooperative and inclusive. For me this is most succinctly expressed in Matthew: 20:24-28. “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. It will not be so among you; but whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave, just as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Whereas the capitalist system creates a system which pits us one against the other and encourages some of us to eat while the poor are

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<sup>11</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*,. p. 37-38.



without food, the biblical text calls us to a society where all share food together. As the second chapter exemplified, the household of Israel and the household of Jesus Christ have been concerned with establishing a household in which people cooperate and share in the abundance - each according to their need. The manna in the wilderness, the vision of Jubilee, Jesus' life and actions, all betray the fundamental truth that it is when bread is broken and shared among God's people that abundance and community are created. There is no abundance in hoarded or stored grain. Making everyone compete over bread will eventually result in a situation where no one is fed. Conversely, breaking bread and sharing bread will ensure that everyone is fed. Indeed, I agree with Meeks that in the Eucharist, where Jesus takes bread, and shares it with the people, the logic of God's economy is revealed. As Meeks explains, "the Eucharist is God's economic act par excellence in the household of Jesus Christ."<sup>12</sup>

Tissa Balysuriya is among those theologians who has tried to vision an alternative to the competitive modern economy. Balysuriya suggests that what we need to create is 'planetary oneness.'<sup>13</sup> Balysuriya's discussion of 'planetary oneness' is interesting. While the neo-liberal agenda is also somewhat of a vision of planetary oneness - a vision in which, globally, all trade barriers are removed and corporations are free to accumulate and transfer capital wherever and whenever they please, Balysuriya's Christian vision is very different. For while the neo-liberal vision is a world in which all barriers to *competition* are removed, Balysuriya's vision is one of full planetary

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 45.

<sup>13</sup> Tissa Balysuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), p. 143ff.





*cooperation.* While the neo-liberal agenda is to remove all those things that impede the neo-colonial enterprise of filtering the natural resources of the South to the coffers and stomachs of the North, Balysuriya reminds us that the Christian vision is of a world that is free from all forms of colonialism and where food is shared (not traded) the world over.<sup>14</sup>

As such I am encouraged by those, both within and outside the Church, who are modelling alternative economic systems - systems where people not compete, with each other. Microfinance institutions (MFIs) are an excellent example of such economics. Microfinance was first initiated by the Bangladeshi economist Muhammad Yunas. Yunas set up the Grameen Bank in 1976. This bank provides loans, usually very small loans at reasonable interest rates, to made-poor people in order to finance income-generating activities. Because the borrowers have no collateral to secure the loans, the MFI works by creating social collateral through peer pressure and support. As Sue Wheat explains, “a ‘solidarity group’ of five or so borrowers will agree and mutually guarantee each other’s loans, deterring default by group members so effectively that repayment rates often stand at well over 90%.”<sup>15</sup> It should also be mentioned that most MFIs focus on women because women are most often excluded from traditional banking services and because women have proved to be more reliable repayers.

MFIs are a clear example of people rejecting the competitive agenda of capitalism and cooperating each other in order to improve everybody’s

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Sue Wheat, “Small Loans: Enabling the poor to step out of poverty through their own resourcefulness makes good economic sense.” *Resurgence*  
[www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/articles/wheat.htm](http://www.gn.apc.org/resurgence/articles/wheat.htm)



standard of living. I am convinced that MFIs are very important enterprises and are an example of exactly the kinds of projects that churches can and should get involved with. Many MFIs are striving to attract soft loans in the form of 'patient equity' funds which do not expect a quick return. For example, BASIX, an Indian rural livelihood credit association is trying to raise capital to provide micro-finance services in India. Vijay Mahajan, President of BASIX, estimates that 75 million Indians need of microfinancing. He may well be right. 40% of India's 1 billion people live on 400 calories per day.<sup>16</sup> Faced with such a situation, I feel that churches can and should switch to investing not in the traditional stock market but in MFIs. Many churches are in the position to invest in 'patient equity' funds and should do so as part of their outreach and social justice work. As Christians we must work with all those who are striving to create world in which people share in, not compete for, the world's resources and especially the world's food.

### **3. The protection of the right of the few to possess property in the capitalist economy as opposed to the protection of all people's, especially the made-poor and marginalised's, right to access the abundance of Creation in God's economy**

It is not difficult to see how an individual and competitive system is prone to protect the right of the few to possess property and to ignore or over-rule the rights of all people, especially the made-poor and marginalised, to access to the abundance of Creation. As Meeks explains, in the capitalist system, "rights defined by the privileged in the economic sphere of life are allowed to define

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.





rights in many other spheres.”<sup>17</sup> I hope that the first chapter made clear that this is especially the case in world agriculture. Those with capital have been allowed to define who has access to land, seed, genetic material, so-called intellectual property and, for course, *food*. Moreover, I hope that it was made equally clear in the second chapter that in God’s economy such practices are condemned and it is emphasised that all must have access to the resources of Creation.

However, the Bible not only emphasises that all must have access to the abundance of Creation, the biblical texts also suggest that for this to happen structural change is necessary. The Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25 are the most obvious example of the structural change envisioned. It is these laws that I will concentrate on in this section as I try to envision how the modern capitalist economy may be transformed into an economy which protects the right of all people, especially the made-poor and marginalised, to access the abundance of Creation.

The Jubilee laws remind us that it is possible, and it may well be necessary, to interfere in a system so as to redistribute the wealth and resources so that all are included, at least to some degree, in the abundance. The Jubilee laws reveal an understanding that no matter how our economic system is organised, human sin and greed are such that wealth and resources will inevitably, to some degree, accumulate in the hands of the rich and powerful. The Jubilee laws are a way by which this sinful accumulation is addressed and the vision of shared abundance is once again put before the society. Unfortunately, the capitalist system has no equivalent of the Jubilee

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<sup>17</sup> Meeks, *God the Economist*, p. 5.



year. There are no measures to redistribute land, there is little or no tithing, there are fewer and fewer banquets where all are invited, debt forgiveness continues to be a difficult battle to fight, the idea that it would be illegal to charge interest is anathema, and those who are enslaved by the modern economic system have little or no hope of ever being freed. There is no sabbath for either people, animals, or the earth (the subject of sabbath will be discussed at greater length in the fourth section). We have become so wed to our system of individual capital and individual property rights that we have forgotten that this is a system of our own invention. We both can and should change and/or temper these rights with a recognition of our collective and individual responsibilities to share the abundance of the earth with all.

I cited Temple's words that "the Church is committed to the everlasting Gospel and to the Creeds which formulate it; it must never commit itself to an ephemeral programme of detailed action."<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, while the bigger vision of this chapter is indeed the alternative vision of shared abundance found in the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, and not any particular programme of detailed action, I would argue that the Church is indeed called to stand by and with those in the world who are working 1) towards land reform and other measures that must accompany land reform to achieve Jubilee and 2) against the commodification of Creation that is so pervasive in today's society and especially in the biotechnology industry. All my research has suggested that *only* when we have significant and widespread redistribution reforms with land reform at the centre, and only when the world's people have access to all of Creation - including specific genetic traits and, most importantly, the seeds of

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<sup>18</sup> Temple, *Christianity and Social Order*, p. 41.



life - will the world's made-poor and hungry be fed. Only then will we have any hope of having any sort of Jubilee. In this section I develop these two arguments more fully.

First of all, land reform. An increasing number of analysts, including a number of analysts from the World Bank, are making the claim that *only* land reform holds the potential to address the chronic underemployment, poverty and hunger in most Third World countries.<sup>19</sup> There is growing evidence that these analysts are right. Brazil is a good example.

Brazil is a country that is desperately in need of land reform. According to 1996 figures 1.6% of farms hold 53.2% of all land. The largest seventy-five farms control five times the combined total area of all small farms. This situation is made even worse by the huge amounts of idle farmland. Forty-two percent of agricultural land in Brazil is idle. Eighty-nine percent of this land is owned by large landowners of 1000 acres or more.<sup>20</sup> Clearly structural change and land reform are needed. Idle farmland is believed to be the leading cause of both rural and urban poverty and hunger in Brazil.

A grassroots movement in Brazil called the Landless Workers Movement (MST) is making significant efforts in the area of land reform. What MST does is occupy idle land belonging to wealthy landlords. The Brazilian Constitution allows for the expropriation of unused agriculturally viable land. The mission of MST is to identify such land and to approach the government about it. It is only if the government fails to respond that MST 'illegally' occupies

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<sup>19</sup> as cited by Rosset, "The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture."

<sup>20</sup> Ministerio Extraordinário de Política Fundiária. *Atlas Fundiário Brasileiro* as cited by *Food First Backgrounder*, Mark S. Langevin and Peter Rosset, Fall 1997 in *The Paradox of Plenty*, Boucher, ed, p. 326.





the land.

When the movement began fifteen years ago, the mayors of rural towns were very much opposed to it. However, in recent years the mayors have seen how the occupations have given the rural economies a much needed economic boost and many of them have had a change of heart. Having 1000 to 3000 families turn idle land into productive farms has had a tremendous impact on the entire region. At present, mayors of some towns are actually petitioning MST to occupy land near their towns. To date, MST has organised 300 000 landless families for the occupation of over 17 million acres of idle land.<sup>21</sup> In addition, they have built 1200 primary schools and created 900 00 new jobs in agriculture with at least as many in nearby cities. Nevertheless, this is not to suggest that this work is not dangerous or that those who follow the capitalist agenda are not opposed to this movement. Between 1985 and 1996 there were 969 assassinations of rural workers and MST activists.<sup>22</sup>

While all of these assassinations are dreadful, what I find heartening about this and other similar movements is the growing amount of evidence, coming both from Brazil and from other places in the world, to suggest that land redistribution actually results in an increase in both the amount of food produced and, more importantly, the number of people being fed. Not only does more people owning land mean that more people have direct access to food, but smaller farms often produce significantly more food per acre than large ones. World Bank studies support this claim. The World Bank has studied the value of output on large and small farms in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia,

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<sup>21</sup> *MST Informa*, no. 15, January 1997 as cited by above.

<sup>22</sup> *Boletim da Comissio Pastoral da Terra-CPT*, no. 136, August 1996 as cited by above.



Ecuador and Guatemala and concluded that the small farms were three to fourteen times more productive than the large farms.<sup>23</sup> It is clear, therefore, that colonialism's and capitalism's joint efforts to concentrate more and more land into the hands of fewer and fewer people have had a negative impact on food security and that these forces need to be opposed if all are to be fed.

Nevertheless, while the World Bank has made the important realisation of land redistribution's key role in alleviating poverty, it must also be understood that the World Bank's land redistribution system are not always popular with the made-poor themselves. For example, MST is very much opposed to the current efforts of the World Bank to get involved in land redistribution in Brazil. Before the World Bank became involved, when land was expropriated the government paid the current owner reparation in the form of bonds and the settlers paid the government this same amount. The government then supported the farmers by providing production credit below market rates. However, under the new World Bank \$2 billion project, owners can now *choose* whether or not to sell. Moreover, if they do choose to sell they must be paid up-front in cash. Finally, the government subsidised credit for the settlers has disappeared under the World Bank (quite what the \$2 billion *is for* I have not been able to ascertain). Clearly the World Bank is trying to reintroduce pure capitalism back into the system and move away from true land redistribution as such. The MST is opposed to the World Bank system for lots of reasons, not the least of which is that the program has resulted in the price of land going up. MST activists are

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<sup>23</sup> World Bank, *The Assault on World Poverty- Problems of Rural Development, Education and Health* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975), p. 215 as cited by Frances Moore Lappé and Joseph Collins, "Why Can't People Feed Themselves?" *The Paradox of Plenty*, Boucher, ed, p. 65.





particularly incensed by this as they point out that the settlers who own this land acquired the land free of charge under past land policies. They complain that the system perpetuates the current power system. Indeed, in light of the work I did in the second chapter, I would argue that while the old system was closer to being a Jubilee system, the World Bank system is a capitalist system and as such is not a system of shared abundance. The World Bank seems to be incapable of seeing outside of the capitalist paradigm of hoarded abundance. It is clear, therefore, that when looking at the issue of land redistribution, we need to be careful that the type of land reform suggested truly will create a Jubilee.

It would seem that Christians could do well to reexamine the ways that the Jubilee laws structured into the rhythm of the society wide scale and significant land reform and to bring these ideas to the table when issues of land redistribution are discussed. For we are desperately in need of finding our own ways of redistributing the land that inevitably gets accumulated in the hands of the rich over the years. However, land reform on its own is not enough. Small farms cannot help but under-produce when the farmers are plagued with problems over credit, debt and tenancy arrangements. Clearly what the modern world is in need of is wide-scale reform not unlike the Jubilee laws of Leviticus 25 . While Leviticus 25 cannot provide a blue-print for structural change in our present context, I would argue that the ideas and concepts contained therein are helpful. For it is clear that in the modern world debts need to be forgiven so that instead of sending money and resources to those who already have too much, countries and individuals can use their money and resources to look after and feed each other. Those who are enslaved to the modern economic system



need to be set free and made part of a new economy, an economy in which none are denied access to the household while, concurrently, made to work for the household. The poor and the disenfranchised need to be allowed to glean from the harvest and there need to be feasts and other ways by which the harvest is shared among all people - even those that are traditionally excluded. Such measures are needed not only in Brazil, but the world over. For example, the following words from a man from Bangladesh are poignant and underscore the realisation of how much wisdom there is in the gleaning and tithing laws of the Hebrew Scriptures.

I earn two pounds of rice, one *taka* (about seven cents) and a meal for a day's work. With that taka I used to buy two more pounds of rice, with a little left over for oil, chilies and salt. But today one taka won't even buy one pound of rice. Employers used to let their workers take a few free vegetables when they went home in the evening, but nowadays they aren't so generous. Times are getting harder for men [sic] like me.<sup>24</sup>

Obviously there need to be structures in place in our modern world to let the poor and the workers share in the abundance that they help produce or that is in their communities. Think how much this man would be helped if the owners he worked for heeded the law that:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, or gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God.  
Lev. 19:9

Think how much his and so many other communities would be helped if those

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<sup>24</sup> as quoted by Betsy Hartmann and James Boyce, *Needless Hunger: Voices from a Bangladesh Village* in *The Paradox of Plenty*, Douglas Boucher, ed., p. 243.



who owned the land and the resources tithed and gave some of what was produced to the community.

I have been encouraged by the recent efforts of churches worldwide in the Jubilee 2000 campaign and especially with its relative successes in the area of so- called debt forgiveness (I would argue that First World nations are more in need of forgiveness for providing such inappropriate loans and exacting such huge amounts of interest than are Third World countries in need of any sort of forgiveness) . However, I hope that churches continue to explore the concept of Jubilee and its implications for our modern political and economic systems. I hope the Church remains ever mindful of the fact that debt forgiveness within the current economic system is not true Jubilee. True Jubilee will require much more wide-spread and fundamental change. For example, the three themes of the Canadian Ecumenical Jubilee Initiative are: 1. Release from Bondage 2. Redistribution of Wealth 3. Renewal of the Earth. I think that the Canadian Initiative is on the right track in that these three inter-related themes suggest the range of structural change that is required to create a society in which not just the rich, but all people, have access to the abundance of Creation.

As I suggested above, another concrete action necessary to guarantee all people access to the abundance of Creation is to ban the patenting and commodification of Creation that takes place in the biotechnology industry. Like land reform, such a ban would be consistent with the Jubilee vision and with the biblical awareness that the resources of the earth are God's and that all should have access to them so that they may provide food for themselves, their families





and their communities. As the first chapter made clear, the biotechnology industry favours the property/intellectual rights of the rich over the communal rights and, indeed, the right to survive, of the poor. Not surprisingly, just as there is widespread advocacy for land reform, there is also widespread advocacy against the biotechnology industry.

Concern about the biotechnology industry and its commodification and patenting of life has been expressed by a great array of people. A number of collective statements against this industry have been released by various groups of scientists, activists, world leaders, farmers, consumers, and faith based organisations. Among them is the 1997 State of the World Forum Statement on Life and Evolution which states that “life must not be treated as a commodity that can be owned, in whole or in part, by anyone, including those who wish to manipulate it in order to design new life forms for human convenience and profit.”<sup>25</sup> The statement also makes the straightforward demand that there be no patents on organisms or their parts, that there be a moratorium on commercial release of GE products, and a comprehensive enquiry into the legitimate and safe use of GE be undertaken.<sup>26</sup> I think that its signatories are on the right track. Similar calls are being made the world over.

The Research Foundation for Science, Technology and Ecology, an organisation founded by Vandana Shiva, has filed a case in the Indian Supreme Court asking for a nationwide ban on GE seed trials. Indeed, Shiva’s organisation advocates that, “just as Gandhi boycotted British textiles and started hand-spinning cloth to get India’s freedom, we are promoting a life-

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<sup>25</sup> 1997 State of the World Forum Statement on Life and Evolution, Appendix of Mae-Wan, Ho. *Genetic Engineering Dream or Nightmare?*

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



enhancing sustainable ecological agriculture that is free of corporate inputs for seeds and chemicals.”<sup>27</sup> Shiva’s organisation is not fooled by the rhetoric of such companies as Monsanto and has named them for what they are - oppressive colonial powers.

Indeed, right now, India seems to be a hot-bed of activity opposing GE. There is currently a “Monsanto Quit India” campaign going on. The campaign is being headed up by a coalition of NGOs and was launched on August 9, 1998, the anniversary of the famous day when Gandhi told the British to “Quit India.”<sup>28</sup> Members of this organisation have put out a statement saying, “We send today a very clear message to all those who have invested in Monsanto in India and abroad: take your money out now, before we reduce it to ashes.”<sup>29</sup> These are not empty words. Grass-roots organisations have burned a large number of GE crops in India and they are prepared to burn any others that may be planted. The organisation is demanding that all tests of GM crops be stopped, that the country’s Patent Act be amended to stop the patenting of basic crop varieties, and that Monsanto be banned from the country.<sup>30</sup> Similar calls are being made in other countries, and, to a certain degree they have been successful. For example, in Brazil, it is law that foreign transgenic products can only be introduced after a period of quarantine to prevent possible damage to native flora.<sup>31</sup> However, while some countries are introducing precautionary

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<sup>27</sup>Vandana Shiva, “Uprooting the seeds of hope,” *Guardian Weekly*, April 4, 1999, p. 20.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Kindnorth, “India Cheers While Monsanto Burns” *The Ecologist*, vol. 29. No. 1 Jan/Feb. 1999.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Brian Tokar, “Monsanto: A Checkered History,” *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 259.





measures regarding GE foods, a 1992 U.S. FDA policy exempted corporations from having to get approval for and test GE food for safety before putting them on the market.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, in April 2000 the European Parliament ruled that GM producers should not be held legally responsible if their food turned out to be harmful for humans or for the environment.<sup>33</sup> Both of these rulings are clear examples of governments putting corporate profits above environmental concerns and above people's health and safety.

It is not surprising that much of the world-wide anger around GE is directed towards the U.S.. Not only are U.S. firms the biggest players in the industry, but U.S. patent law is also at the basis of the entire industry. It was in 1980 that the U.S. supreme court ruled the GE microorganisms could be patented. It was U.S. patent law that the WTO modelled its own Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) and Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) after. As such, all WTO members are bound by these patent laws and many people are legitimately angry.

On July 22, 1998 several hundred Thai farmers gathered outside the U.S. embassy in Bangkok to protest the granting of patents for two GE strains of rice, "Jasmati and Basmati." The farmers were asking the U.S. government to revoke the patents. They argued that the U.S. government was "stealing the natural resources and cultural heritage of poor farmers in Third World countries."<sup>34</sup> I think that the farmers are right to protest this new form of

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<sup>32</sup> Kristin Dawkins, *Gene Wars: The Politics of Biotechnology* New York: Seven Stories Press, 1997, p. 33 as cited by Jennifer Ferrara, "Revolving Doors: Monsanto and the Regulators," *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 281.

<sup>33</sup> Andrew Osborn, "Euro vote 'lets GM companies off the hook,'" *The Guardian Weekly* April 20, 2000, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> as cited in "Crops and Robbers." *The Ecologist*, Sep/Oct 1998, p. 287.



colonialism and that companies should not be granted patents for making minor genetic modifications to crops that have been grown in Thailand for thousands of years.

In light of all this it becomes clear that both national governments and the WTO should stop granting patents on life. Indeed, I would argue that world trade laws should make it illegal to patent life. Not only should science and technology be viewed not as uniquely Western, but as a plurality associated with all cultures and civilisations,<sup>35</sup> the resources of the planet should be seen as God's and not as anything that anyone can patent or commodify. It must be recognised that when we patent and commodify Creation we sin by making it inaccessible to all people. We sin by taking something that is God's, and trying to make it into something that we can own, compete over and commodify. As such, I think that churches have an integral role to play in the fight against the current rise of the biotechnology industry. While I have been encouraged by the growing number of articles in religious publications about this industry and its implications for humanity and for the rest of Creation, I think that churches could do much more. At the very least they could ensure that they are not investing in biotech companies.

Nevertheless, as significant as both land reform and the ban of the patenting of genetic and biological material would be, both of these measures would only be small steps in moving away from a capitalist system that favours the property/intellectual rights of the rich and powerful and towards a system that concerns itself with the rights of access to Creation of the made-poor and the marginalised. For, the truth is that as long as the assumptions and agenda of

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<sup>35</sup> Shiva, *The Violence of the Green Revolution*, p. 233.



the current system go unchecked, even were land reform to be effected and even if the commodification of genetic material and of life itself were to be banned, the system would find other ways to favour the property/intellectual rights of the rich and powerful and to continue to oppress the made-poor and marginalised. As such, not only must the Church continue to be involved in efforts to promote land reform and other Jubilee measures, and not only must the Church continue to be involved in opposing the spread of the biotechnology industry, but we must be ever-vigilant in holding the world accountable to the biblical vision of shared abundance. We must continuously prophesise against systems that are prepared to sacrifice the well-being of the made-poor and marginalised in order to protect the riches of the already rich, and we must instead offer a vision of a system which centers itself around and measures itself by the standard of living of the very least of its members. We must continuously witness to and work towards God's economy where all are invited to the table, all are included in the household, and no one is made a slave.

#### **4. The unlimited progress and growth and so-called efficiency of the capitalist economy as opposed to the wholistic and relational vision of Creation's integrity in God's economy**

This thesis has made clear that modern world agriculture is an unsustainable industry. Individualism, competition, and commodification have created a ruinous agricultural system. The capitalism that fuels the industry leaves the world constantly scrambling to produce more and more food in less and less time. This is called progress, growth and efficiency. The irony is that modern agriculture absorbs more energy in the form of fuel and inputs than it





gives back in calories. The irony is that the earth is dying and the people who most need this food are also dying as this abundance of food is being fed to less and less people.

Clearly we need a new paradigm for world agriculture. Clearly we need a new definition of progress, a new definition of growth and a new definition of efficiency. Clearly we need to realise that the progress and growth we currently have is coming at the expense of the earth. Clearly we need to see that the more traditional system of having smaller more local farms is actually much more efficient in terms of producing a variety of foods and distributing them to the local community. A Peter Rosset explains:

On the small farm, productive activities, labour mobilisation, consumption patterns, ecological knowledge and common interests in long-term maintenance of the farm as a resource, contribute to a stable and lasting economic and family-based enterprise.<sup>36</sup>

Indeed, as was discussed in the previous section, studies show that small farms produce more output per acre, often require less inputs, and are usually better able to distribute food to the local community. Moreover, small farms provide employment to the local community.

However, the fact is that there are very few sustainable small farms left for the current system favours the mega-farms of agribusiness. It is these farms who receive the subsidies and who can compete on the global market. With agricultural prices being as low as they are, only those who own huge tracts of land can survive. The paradigm of unlimited progress and growth and so-called efficiency has led to the disappearance, in a growing number of countries, of the

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<sup>36</sup> Peter Rosset, "The Multiple Functions and Benefits of Small Farm Agriculture."



small and even medium sized farm. For example, the category of 'farmer' was recently removed from the U.S. census. Apparently, once a profession employs less than one percent of the population it is removed from the census. This would have been unthinkable before the advent of agribusiness when farmers were considered to be the backbone of the U.S. economy. However, since the Second World War, two-thirds of American farms have disappeared.<sup>37</sup> Things have been especially harsh for black farmers. In 1910 black America owned over 15 million acres of land. Today, black ownership is less than 2.3 million acres.<sup>38</sup> Unfortunately, many other countries, including Third World countries, have equally alarming statistics.

The problem, of course, with agriculture being under the control, not of local farmers, but of TNCs, is that TNCs inevitably have less investment in the local community and the local ecosystem. While the mono-cropping techniques of agribusiness' mega-farms efficiently grow profits for TNCs, they are inefficient at providing either employment, food or any other benefits to the local community and very efficient at causing ecological destruction. Much of the problem is that agribusiness requires a high level of dangerous and unsustainable inputs (pesticides, water, petrochemicals, machinery). Not only do these inputs lower the number of people that are employed in agriculture and thus have a negative impact on the local community, but these inputs have a very adverse effect on the environment and the local ecosystem. Topsoil is being lost at alarming rates. Ground water is being depleted. Overuse and poor drainage are causing the salinization of water used in agriculture. Our

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<sup>37</sup> Lappé, Collins and Rosset, with Esparza, "Beyond Guilt and Fear," p. 29.

<sup>38</sup> David Hacker "From the ground up: saving the black farmer." *The Witness* Vol. 82 Jan/Feb 1999. p. 15.





rivers and other water sources are being poisoned from the run-off from the pesticides and other chemicals used in agribusiness. Indeed, agribusiness' impact on water may well be one of the biggest issues of the twenty-first century. UNESCO predicts that because of pollution and over-use, by the year 2025, most of the population of the planet will be living in conditions of water scarcity. Agriculture plays a huge role in this impending catastrophe. Agricultural irrigation accounts for an astounding 70% of fresh water use.<sup>39</sup> Clearly any sustainable agricultural system is going to have both to pollute less water and to use less water than does the current system.

To become sustainable, the current system is going to have to see beyond the myth of technological messianism that currently pervades the industry, if not the culture. What I call the myth of technological messianism is, quite simply, the myth that the limits of Creation can be overcome through technology. Agribusiness' use of water is a good example of this myth. Our use of irrigation and other water technologies has been in the hope that the apparent limits of Creation could be overcome by our cleverness. We had hoped that irrigation technologies could help us grow more food. However, as the UNESCO report suggests, this strategy has back-fired as far from overcoming perceived scarcities we have actually created a far more alarming scarcity - a scarcity of fresh water! The fact is that the limitless growth framework of the economy is ecologically impossible. The integrity of Creation cannot be 'overcome' without grave consequences.

Unfortunately, despite the evidence to the contrary, the myth of

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<sup>39</sup> Hervé Kempf, "La planète est menacée par de graves pénuries d'eau au XXI<sup>e</sup> siècle," *Le Monde* Vendredi 17 Mars, 2000, p. 2.



technological messianism continues. Indeed, the myth often mixes in with the racist colonial framework that the agribusiness industry also assumes. For example, it is not difficult to see how the industry assumes that the reason that Third World farmers have not been able to create higher yields of export crops is because their agricultural practices lack the sophistication of Western technology and science. This is racist. There is no acknowledgment that agricultural practices that have sustained people for thousands of years could contain any wisdom whatsoever. Not only has their own myopia prevented them from seeing that the myth of higher productivity is discounted when you take into account all of the inputs, but they have also failed to see that while chemicals are one way to kill the pests that accompany mono-cropping -albeit an expensive and dangerous one - the sustainable alternative is to avoid mono-cropping altogether and, as farmers have done for thousand of years, both rotate crops and plant a variety of seeds. Not only will this practice mean that the farmer and their community will have a balanced diet, but it will also prevent the establishment of pests and will naturally regenerate the soil. Nevertheless, both the myth of technological messianism and the racist colonial framework inhibit these truths from being recognised.

Despite all the evidence to the contrary, the delusion that modern agribusiness is the only way to feed the modern world persists. As Ho so succinctly summarises, the problem with this delusion is that:

It displaces and marginalises all alternative approaches that address social and environmental causes of malnutrition and ill-health, such as poverty and unemployment, and the need for a sustainable agriculture that could regenerate the environment, guarantee long-term food security and at the same time, conserve indigenous



biodiversity. It claims to solve problems that reductionist science and industry have created in the first place - widespread environmental deterioration from the intensive, high input agriculture of the Green Revolution, and accumulation of toxic wastes from chemical industries.<sup>40</sup>

For, as Ho and others are well aware, there are viable alternative systems. For example, it is interesting to look at the recent successes that Cuba has had in creating both food security and food sovereignty. While the U.S. has been hard at work trying to spread its agenda of globalisation to most of the planet, when it comes to Cuba, the U.S. has made considerable efforts to exclude Cuba from global trade. It is interesting to look at how this has effected Cuba's food security and food sovereignty.

First of all, it must be said before 1989 much of Cuba's agriculture was based on large farms using chemicals and machinery to produce crops for export. Cuba imported over half of its food. As such, it was not surprising that the 1989 embargo plunged Cuba into a major food crisis. Cuba could no longer import either food or inputs such as chemicals, fertilisers and petrochemicals. Consumption of calories and protein dropped by as much as 30%. However, by 1997, Cubans were eating almost as much as they did before 1989 and very little food was being imported.

Much of the reason for this was that following the trade embargo there was, for obvious reasons, a strong internal market for agricultural products. Farmers that were able to produce food were able to secure good prices for their efforts. As a result, farmers were encouraged to find ways to produce food for local consumption despite the scarcity of external inputs such as machinery

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<sup>40</sup> Ho, *Genetic Engineering Dream or Nightmare*, p. 11-12.





and chemicals. Not surprisingly, under such conditions it was the small farms and the cooperatives that did best. These farms were best able to switch to organic methods.

The Cuban government also made several important measures to enhance food security. The state instituted land reform by parcelling out state farms to employees and creating many small production units. In addition, the government initiated programs for organic urban gardening using vacant lots. These efforts have created quite a stable and self-sufficient food system. Analysts cite Cuba as evidence that a small-farm and low input system can indeed become a viable and self-sufficient food production system. It is probably not surprising, therefore, that at the 1996 World Food Summit, the same summit at which the U.S. refused to concede that access to food was a human right, it was Fidel Castro who rightly pointed out that the summit's goal of reducing world hunger by 50% by the year 2015 fell well short of the mark. Castro made the important point that 400 million hungry people is a disgraceful goal for humanity to set.<sup>41</sup> However, as usual, Castro and those others who spoke against the current agenda of globalisation were marginalised. It seems that it is only the voices of the TNCs that are given hearing.

Nevertheless, as important of an illustration of sustainable agriculture as Cuba is, it is limited in that it was necessity, not choice, that led the Cubans to adopt such agricultural methods. As such, I think that there would be even more to learn by comparing and contrasting, not simply Cuban agriculture and the agricultural systems of those countries that have been included in globalisation,

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<sup>41</sup> as cited by Peter Rosset, "Food and Justice in the New Millennium: Changing How We Think About Hunger" in *The Paradox of Plenty*, Boucher, ed., p. 334.



but the relationship that the modern capitalist system has with the earth, with the land, with God's creation, versus the more traditional relationship with the land that some indigenous and farming communities have managed to maintain. For while using less chemicals and having more community gardens are important steps, on their own, they are not going to be enough. Our entire relationship with Creation needs to be reexamined and reconceptualised if we are truly going to move towards a long-term sustainable system for the whole world. For it will only be when we can approach agriculture out of a love for and respect for God's splendid Creation that agriculture will truly be transformed.

Therefore, I would argue that what truly needs to be examined is the age-old struggle between the coloniser's belief - necessary to justify their exploitation - that land is a commodity to be possessed (whether by confiscation, war, purchase, etc.) for the sake of so-called progress and the accumulation of wealth for the elites, and what I shall call the colonised's traditional belief that the land is a gift from God to be cherished and shared. This struggle pervades the biblical texts. This struggle pervades history. It became incarnate in the North American history of colonialism when Chief Seattle confronted the ideology of his colonisers. Notice the parallels between the last sentence of the following statement and Numbers 35:34, "You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites."

We know that the white man does not understand our ways. One portion of the land is the same to him as the next, for he is a stranger who comes in the night and takes from the land whatever he needs. The earth is not his brother, but his





enemy, and when he has conquered it, he moves on. He leaves his fathers' graves behind, and he does not care. He kidnaps the earth from his children, and he does not care. . . He treats his mother, the earth, and his brother, the sky, as things to be bought, plundered, sold like sheep or bright beads. His appetite will devour the earth and leave behind only a desert. . .

One thing we know, which the white man may one day discover - our God is the same God. You may think now that you own him as you wish to own our land; but you cannot. He is the God of man, and his compassion is equal for the red man and the white. The earth is precious to him, and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its Creator.<sup>42</sup>

Reading these words I wonder how much more respect Chief Seattle would have had for the white man had Christian society managed to keep hold of the biblical idea of the land being God's? How would the colonisation of this continent look different if Western Christian society had managed to continue to embody some sense that the earth is God's and we are but strangers and sojourners? Where would we be if the idea that "You shall not defile the land in which you live, in which I also dwell; for I the Lord dwell among the Israelites" (Num. 35:34) had remained as part of the tradition? Would we not have been more able to accept and respect the relationship that the indigenous people of this land had with the earth? Where would we be today if Sabbath had been structured onto the rhythm of modern society? Would the land and the people, together, not be much better off? How different life today would be were we to heed Brueggeman's words that Sabbath land is a reminder to us that "land is not fully given over to our satiation. Land has its own rights over against us and even its own existence. It is in Covenant with us but not totally at our

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<sup>42</sup> Chief Seattle's statement quoted in *The Great Chief Sends Word* as cited by Kenith David, *Sacrament and Struggle*, (Geneva: WCC, 1994), p. 60.



disposal.”<sup>43</sup>

The only hope for humanity is that we reclaim some sense of the sacredness of the earth and some sense of humility in our relationship with it. I am encouraged by those currents in society that are working to create this. For example, I was touched when I read the 1997 World Forum Statement on Life and Evolution . This statement makes a poetic plea for humanity to recognise the beauty, complexity and inter-connectedness of Creation.

Life is an intricate web of relations that evolves in its own right, interfacing and integrating its myriad diverse elements. The complexity and interdependence of all forms of life have the consequence that the process of evolution cannot be controlled, though it can be influenced. It involves an unpredictable creative unfolding that calls for sensitive participation from all the players, particularly from the youngest, most recent arrivals, human beings.<sup>44</sup>

I only hope that this sort of vision and humility can indeed be reclaimed - for all of our sakes. As Christians it is time for us to reclaim those aspects of our tradition that call us back into right relationship with the earth and to work with all those who share a wholistic and relational vision of Creation's integrity and who are working to create more just and sustainable relationships with and within Creation. The efforts of the World Council of Churches regarding 'Peace, Justice and the Integrity of Creation' are helpful as are the many environmental task forces and grassroots efforts of other denominational groups. These efforts much be encouraged and expanded. The Church must continue to discover ways to keep the world every mindful that the land is God's

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<sup>43</sup> Brueggemann, *The Land* , p. 64.

<sup>44</sup> 1997 State of the World Forum Statement on Life and Evolution, Appendix of Ho. *Genetic Engineering Dream or Nightmare?*



and that we cannot live in right relation with God without concurrently living in right relation with the earth. This must be incorporated into our liturgies, our education programs and, most importantly, our corporate life. Churches must not only be places where we come and celebrate the integrity of Creation, but they must be places where living in right relation with Creation is modelled. Churches must not only make every effort to ensure that their own consumption of resources and, especially, of food, is responsible, but churches must find ways to become involved in caring for both local and global ecosystems. For, as the scriptures tell us, it is only when we all learn to live in right relation with God, each other and Creation that there is any hope of us all having food security.

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season, and the lands shall yield their fruit. Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land.

Lev. 26:3-5

## **Closing Remarks**

I hope that this thesis has been able to convey some sense of the power and magnificence of the biblical vision of shared abundance. For I believe that it is only when this vision has been rekindled in the hearts and minds of Christians that the Church will be able to be a prophetic voice in the world denouncing the injustices of the present system and offering this vision of shared abundance as a beacon of hope and as an alternative paradigm.

However, the Church cannot simply be a prophetic voice triumphantly





condemning the structural violence of the current system. The Church cannot simply hold this vision of shared abundance up against the institutions and structures of the so-called outside world. We must also hold this vision up against our own traditions, institutions and sacraments. Specifically, the Christian community should begin to explore in what ways this vision of shared abundance is and is not embodied by our Eucharistic celebrations. In short, I would argue that any rediscovery of the idea of shared abundance should push us, as a Christian community, to discover what it would mean not simply to celebrate the Eucharist in our churches on Sundays, but to *live eucharistically* in the world and to help transform the world into a true Eucharistic community. While a complete examination of what it would mean to live eucharistically in the world is beyond the scope of this thesis, I think that the material provided here could be a good beginning point. For, it seems obvious that for the world to be a true Eucharistic community, everyone must, at the very least, be fed.

As it is, at a global level, we are very far from being a true Eucharistic community. The global banquet is a far cry from the vision of when the “people will come from east and west, from north and south, and will eat in the kingdom of God. Indeed, some are last who will be first, and some are first who will be last.” ( Luke 13:29-30). 790 million people are hungry and do not have food security. In fact, the global banquet today is no dissimilar from the botched Eucharist that is condemned in the letter to the Corinthians where “when the time comes to eat, each of you goes ahead with your own supper, and one goes hungry and another becomes drunk.” (1 Cor. 11: 21).

While our context is very different from the church at Corinth, I think that it



is fair to extrapolate from this passage and say that whereas the modern capitalist system pits us one against the other and encourages some of us to eat while the poor are without food, we as Christians are called, as Paul rightly reminds us, to a society where all share food together. We as modern day first world Christians should not eat and drink without being conscious of all those members of the body who are denied access to food. As Paul warns, “anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment upon themselves” (1 Cor. 11:29). Tissa Balysuriya offers a useful and poignant reminder of this.

Many of us eat daily bread produced by the sweat of exploited people’s labour. Since the Eucharist is the sacrament of unity, it must also be the sacrament of world justice. The meaning of the Church as one, universal and Catholic must be rethought in terms of the planetary oneness of the human family today.<sup>45</sup>

As Christians it is time for us to take note of how, on a global level, the world is very far from having any sort of true Eucharistic feast.

The central symbolic action for the Christian faith is the Eucharist. It is in this sacrament that we come together, as a community of faith, to remember our tradition and to celebrate our faith and our life in God. I would argue that in this sacrament we act out our faith in God as owner and host and our own responsibility to live into God’s vision of shared abundance. In the Eucharist, we *take* bread, *bless* it, *break* it and *share* it among the community. In blessing the bread that we have taken from the abundance of Creation we recognise that this bread is a gift from God. In breaking the bread and sharing it among the community we live out God’s wisdom that there is no life in hoarded

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<sup>45</sup> Tissa Balysuriya, *The Eucharist and Human Liberation*, p. 143.





bread but only in bread that is broken and shared amongst all. In this sacrament we remember the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. We remember how Jesus incarnated God's willingness to be broken open for the life of the world and we covenant to do the same - to be broken open, as individuals and as a community, for the life of the world. We look toward the heavenly banquet in the kingdom of God and celebrate that this kingdom is already among us. We celebrate that the love of God is present when a community comes together and breaks and shares bread together.

As I reflect on this sacrament it occurs to me that you can find, in the Eucharist, each of the four concepts I explored in my last chapter. Each of the other four ideals I outline in this chapter, 1) community, 2) cooperation and sharing, 3) protection of all people's, especially the made-poor and marginalised, right to access the abundance of Creation, and 4) a wholistic and relational vision of Creation's integrity are all central Eucharistic concepts.

First of all, in the Eucharist the community comes together and, in a radically individualistic world, symbolically and actually performs an action that is radically communal. Very simply, the community takes bread, thanks God for having provided it, breaks the bread and shares it with each other. This is beautifully expressed in the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada when, at the breaking of the bread, we pray:

Celebrant:	Creator of all, you gave us golden fields of wheat, whose many grains have been gathered and made into this one bread.
All:	So may your Church be gathered from the ends of the earth



into your kingdom.<sup>46</sup>

During the Eucharist, the community shares a meal and celebrates their life together as a community and as members of the body of Christ. There is one cup and one loaf from which we are all fed. This action is so communal, in fact, that we often call it Communion.

Secondly, the Eucharist is an example of cooperation and sharing. While most of the world competes for food, in the Eucharist all share in food together. In The Eucharist, no one is left out, no one receives more than another. Again, this is beautifully expressed by another of the prayers in the Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada that can be said at the breaking of the bread.

Celebrant:	We break this bread to share in the body of Christ
All:	We, being many, are one body, for we all share in the one bread. <sup>47</sup>

Apart from being a sign and symbol of community, cooperation and sharing, the Eucharist is also a radical symbol of the protection of all people's, especially the made-poor and marginalised, right to access the abundance of Creation. In the Eucharist we remember Jesus' radical eating and feeding practices and try and emulate such practices in our own lives and communities. We remember how Jesus shared bread with sinners and tax collectors, Jews and Gentiles, the made-poor, the outcasts and the down-trodden. We remember the life and witness of the One who reminded us that when we hold a banquet we are not to invite our friends and neighbours but the poor, the

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<sup>46</sup> *The Book of Alternative Services of the Anglican Church of Canada* (Toronto: Anglican Book Centre, 1985). p. 212.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*



crippled and the lame (Luke 14:12-13). In a world that continuously denies access to all those who do not have capital, the Eucharist is a radical statement that life and love are God's gifts to us all - even the poorest amongst us. In the Eucharist we remember Jesus, in whom God seeks out those who are in need, invites them to his table, fills their need and commissions them to go out and love and feed others. This is well expressed in the Prayer after Communion in the Anglican Church of Canada's supplementary liturgical material.

Gracious God  
we thank you for feeding us  
with the body and blood of your Son  
Jesus Christ.  
May we, who share his body,  
live his risen life;  
we, who drink his cup,  
bring life to others;  
we, whom the Spirit lights,  
give light to the world.  
Keep us firm in the hope you have set before us,  
so that we and all your children shall be free,  
and the whole earth live to praise your name;  
through Christ our Lord. Amen.<sup>48</sup>

Finally, Eucharistic celebrations are a radical symbol of the integrity and wholeness of Creation. This is most clearly expressed in the Eucharistic prayer when the community joins in singing the Sanctus. In this action, the community acknowledges and celebrates the integrity and wholeness of Creation, as created and redeemed by God. For example, the preface to the Sanctus in the Supplementary Eucharist Prayer 1 of the Canadian Anglican Church's Book of Alternative Services expresses this well. "Joining in the song of the universe we proclaim your glory singing:

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<sup>48</sup> *Three Supplementary Eucharistic Prayers for the Book of Alternative Services and Two Services of the Word* (Toronto: Anglican Book centre, 1998), p. 26-27.





Holy, holy, holy Lord,  
God of power and might,  
heaven and earth are full of your glory.  
Hosanna in the highest.

Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord.  
Hosanna in the highest.”<sup>49</sup>

Clearly the Eucharist is a radical acknowledgement and celebration of the integrity and wholeness of Creation. Clearly those of us who celebrate the Eucharist should be prophetic witnesses against all those who defile the earth and deny access to Creation to some of God’s people. If we really take the Eucharist seriously, we should be working to rekindle a sense of the sacredness of the earth and of our need to live in right relation with it and with each other.

In short, I conclude that as Christians it is time for us to remember that the Eucharist is not simply a sacrament that we celebrate together in churches on Sundays. The Eucharist is a sacrament of shared abundance - the shared abundance that God intends for us and for all of Creation. As Christians, it is our call to use the powerful alternative vision of shared abundance that is contained in our tradition and that is enacted in the sacrament of the Eucharist to witness to the injustices of modern world agriculture and to respond with love, hope and compassion. For the Eucharists that we celebrate in churches, are, after all, meant to be signs and foretastes of the feast to come. For this feast to come we need to be critically engaged with our current context and consciously offering, modelling, and working toward an alternative vision of shared abundance.

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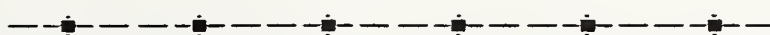
<sup>49</sup> Ibid. p. 15.



# The Zeist Declaration on Trade Liberalisation and the Right to Food

*April 1999*

*This declaration was shared with Inter-Church Action (ICA) by the Global Forum on Sustainable Food and Nutritional Security. One member of ICA's former Sustainable Agriculture Working Group (SAWG) and several SAWG partners attended the conference in Zeist (Netherlands) from April 18-22, 1999.*



Food security is a basic human right. Trade liberalisation and structural adjustment is threatening this right.

Representatives of 57 civil society organisations from Africa, Asia, Latin America and Europe gathered in Zeist (Netherlands) from the 18-22 of April 1999, initiated by APRODEV, to discuss the issues of agriculture and trade policies and the implications for the food security of the poor.

In the light of the forthcoming review of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the ongoing post-Lomé negotiations, as well as the widespread concern about agricultural adjustment and the role of agribusiness TNCs we wish to bring the experiences of the majority of our communities, as documented in case studies to the focus of policy-makers, at all levels.

## Principles

We recognise food security as the physical and economic access to adequate safe and healthy food by all people at all times in dignity. Key factors in realising food security are the issues of who produces food, where it is produced, what food is produced, how it is produced, as well as who controls trade and key productive resources, such as land, water, and biodiversity. Food Sovereignty to our countries and communities means having the democratic right and power to determine the production, distribution and consumption of food, according to our preferences and cultural traditions. Food security implies securing the livelihood of food producing communities.

The 1996 World Food Summit adopted the target of reducing by half the number of under-nourished people by the year 2015. This is not morally acceptable to us. World leaders must take responsibility for all the malnourished and hungry people. The policies of trade liberalisation and structural adjustment make it impossible to achieve even this unacceptably modest target: It undermines a number of the necessary measures through reduction of health and education expenses, lack of investment in small scale agriculture, by opening markets to unfair competition from subsidised production from the North, and by commodifying land, food, water and seeds.

Reform in trade policies will not be sufficient to achieve food for all. National governments must ensure that every family has access to its minimum food requirements. and secure equitable





distribution of productive assets, income generating opportunities and household incomes.

Furthermore, sustainable/ecological agricultural systems and small scale farming must be promoted as the foundation for food security, as recommended in Agenda 21 adopted at the 1992 Earth Summit. All these can be attained only when full and equal participation of women is guaranteed.

### **Structural Adjustment**

Food Security for the poor is undermined by structural adjustment policies. The policy of accepting short term pain for promises of long term benefit is not acceptable. Economic growth will not reduce the number of the poor unless it includes measures of economic redistribution. The purpose of adjustment should be to optimise local resources and develop national and regional economies rather than integration into the global economy. When agricultural exports get higher priority than local food production, women risk losing control over food supplies and the ability to provide for families and communities.

The promotion of private ownership to land, the commodification of water, seeds and genetic resources paves the way for TNCs to take over control of vital national resources.

High levels of indebtedness and the servicing of unfair debt force these poor developing countries to reduce basic health and education services and agricultural support systems. The debt burden endangers food and nutrition security especially for women and children.

### **Recommendations and demands on structural adjustment**

1. IMF and the World Bank should abolish conditionalities demanding governments to liberalise agricultural and other imports, and allow protection of food security and the domestic economy
2. International Financial Institutions and national governments should develop structural reforms tailored to the need of each individual country, including redistributive measures aimed at eradicating poverty and improving food security. Safety nets for the most vulnerable should be in place from the beginning of the reform process.
3. National governments must ensure peoples participation by involving the civil society in the planning and implementation policies at all levels affecting food security.
4. National governments, and the donor community should develop policies and support in favour of the small scale farming sector, including access to land, credit and other productive resources, especially for women producers. Trade reforms should take account of the important role of the informal sector in job creation and economic growth.
5. Heads of states of the G8 countries and other developed countries should cancel the unpayable debts to the poor developing countries as demanded by the global Jubilee 2000 campaign
6. Recognising the role that women have in food security, national governments should develop programmes that reinforce the civil rights of women.

### **Trade Liberalisation**



The countries of the South face double standards when Northern countries advocate open economies while maintaining high protection and subsidies for their own agricultural and food sectors. The WTO Agreement on Agriculture is extremely imbalanced and unfair because it applies similar rules countries which different agricultural structures:

It prevents developing countries the use of the support measures which enabled the EU and US to develop their agricultural strength

It obliges poor developing countries to provide market access irrespective of their own vulnerable agricultural systems, while allowing the developed countries to protect their markets and provide producer subsidies.

It allows only agricultural support measures which are out of reach of most developing countries

Its measures of special and differential treatment for developing countries are insufficient in providing for the particular needs of their agricultural sector and their problems with food insecurity.

Its measures for compensation to net food importing developing countries have never been implemented.

Trade liberalisation is displaying a bias against small producers and for larger producers and export crop production. Agribusiness transnational corporations have reaped the gains from trade liberalisation, and have become even more powerful. Trade liberalisation has thus been accompanied by growing land alienation, declining food entitlements, a growing number of hungry people, and reduction of biodiversity

#### **Recommendations and demands on trade liberalisation:**

1 We demand that the member states of WTO freeze further negotiations for at least two years in order to conduct a comprehensive impact assessment of the AoA, as required by Article 20, and the TRIPs. During this period, developing countries should have the right to support their food production regardless of the limitations in the AoA. .

2 WTO and other actors must undertake a systematic review of the agreement with a view to removing its imbalances and unfair provisions, by providing better market access, incorporating non-trade concerns, in particular food security, and introducing clear mechanisms for implementation of the Marrakesh decision for net food importing developing countries, such as an automatic trigger mechanism

3 WTO and FAO, in partnership with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, should convene a high level meeting attended by governments and civil society and intergovernmental organisations to discuss and debate the impact assessment of the AoA. The high level meeting should be preceded by a series of national debates involving government and civil society.

4 In the TRIPs agreement of the WTO member countries should have the right to exclude living organisms such as plants and animals from patenting. Least developed countries must be exempted from the whole TRIPS agreement.





5 In the meantime, National Governments and civil society must take concrete measures in order to combat and erase the negative effects of the agreement on developing countries, stabilize their agricultural production and provide market access for their products. The capacity of developing countries to participate in trade negotiations must be strengthened.

6 The review of the AoA shall include provisions to prevent monopolies, and to monitor the role of TNCs. Regional and plurilateral trade agreements should be reviewed with the same objective as the review of the WTO AoA.

7 WTO should not prevent non-reciprocal trade agreements, where development needs are clearly demonstrated, such as the Lome-agreement, providing the ACP countries with access to EU-markets without receiving a similar market access.

### **Global reform**

The process of economic and trade globalisation calls for an active international civil society as a counterbalance to the power of transnational corporations. Globalisation is the result of deliberate political decisions and should be controlled by governments accountable to people and not to corporate interests, and directed in favour of sustainable development. A radical change in the process of globalisation will require a major reform in the international financial architecture and in trade agreements in order to achieve a fairer balance of power between the rich and poor nations.

### **Civil society follow up**

We call on everyone to join us in working for a Peoples' Summit on the issues of food security, food safety, food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture towards the convocation of a Global Convention on Food.

We commit ourselves to strive relentlessly, through advocacy, empowerment and networking to achieve sustainable agricultural development, economic justice for the poor and food security for all.



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